Eating: A Pleasure, Challenge or Disorder?

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Abstract
In many cultures, eating is an important social and family occasion, a pleasurable experience and thus is an enjoyment in life. However, there are other facets of eating whereby it poses as a challenge to a wide sector of adolescents who exhibit weight-related concerns and behaviours. A significant proportion of them fall into the spectrum of disordered eating. At one extreme of the spectrum is morbid obesity and at the other, anorexia nervosa. Obesity has increased markedly in the past two decades in all developed countries and regions. The medical consequences of obesity are well studied. But obesity in adolescents is not mere overeating. Overeating in adolescents has been shown to be associated with a number of adverse behaviours and negative psychosocial experiences. In fact, it may be a clear sign alerting for intervention, intervention that crosses disciplines. This paper addresses the psychosocial risks of obese adolescents that youth workers and professionals need to be cognisant of. Intervention strategies with particular emphasis on prevention rationale and approaches that tap on intersectoral collaboration are discussed. (HK J Paediatr (new series) 2004;9:365-370)

Key words: Global epidemic; Intersectoral collaboration; Negative psychosocial experience; Obesity; Prevention strategies