

# GLOBAL OBESITY A GROWING PROBLEM

Recent research has found that North America has the highest body mass in the world. Published in the BMC Public Health online journal, the study by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine says that while the average global body mass is 62kg, North Americans have an average body mass of 80.7kg. The continent comprises only 6% of the world's population, but has 34% of the world's biomass, due to obesity. The study points out that in contrast, Asia has 61% of the world's population, but only 13% of the world's biomass, due to obesity. Obesity-related conditions include heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke and certain types of cancer, which are all preventable. And obesity can also be life-threatening.

American world news website, Global Post, in a 22 November 2012 article stated that for the first time in human history, there are more obese people in the world than people who are hungry. In South Africa, we are no different. As the most

developed country in sub-Saharan Africa, 61% of our adults are obese, according to research released in October 2012 by pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline.

Many reasons have been cited for this seemingly sudden spike of global obesity. Lead author of an October 2012 study published in The Lancet medical journal, Jenny Cresswell says global dietary changes like the consumption of high-fat and high-sugar foods, together with urbanisation and a more sedentary lifestyle are major contributing factors.

Globally, people are being besieged by the weight loss industry which advocates high-protein, fat-free, food combining, calorie counting fads in regular rotation, often in glitzy Hollywood packaging like the South Beach Diet and the Zone Diet and fat loss gurus abound. But all the while, populations are just becoming fatter and fatter.

A Johannesburg pharmacist believes she has discovered another answer. "Fat people don't suffer from a lack of willpower; they are overweight because of biochemical imbalances in the brain which make them overeat, but they never feel full, or their bodies latch onto every calorie and store it as fat," says Paula Galvão.

Biochemicals include leptin, which regulates satiety and energy-burning, and insulin, which regulates blood sugar. Until biochemical imbalances are corrected, no diet will help, Galvão says. Imbalances have a number of causes – nutritional deficiency, genetics, stress and hormonal problems. "Our hormones become unbalanced as we get older. This explains why we get fatter as we age," says Galvão. "In women the oestrogen to progesterone ratio is very important. High levels of stress cause progesterone to convert to oestrogen, causing fat accumulation on the hips and in the stomach area."

