

# Health Politics with Dr. Mike Magee

## The Real Story Behind Obesity

(NAPSA)—Obesity is an urgent epidemic with catastrophic implications but, so far, the public discussion hasn't focused on the right answers to the problem. Why aren't more people trying to find ways to understand and prevent obesity, rather than just adapting to it?



**Mike Magee, MD**

For example, in 2003, there were more than 103,000 gastric bypass surgeries for morbid obesity in the United States. And, all across America, things are getting bigger to accommodate bigger Americans. Take, for instance, the Puget Sound ferry seats, which were recently widened from 18 inches to 20 inches. Or the Colorado ambulances that are now equipped with a hydraulic winch capable of lifting a 1,000-pound human. And, lastly, Indiana has a new super-sized casket that's 38 inches wide, rather than the standard 24 inches.

Since these measures aren't solving the problem, how should we be thinking about obesity? First, we must take into consideration that the science of obesity is complex and still in its infancy. The hormone leptin, which is produced by fat cells and provides the chemical message to the brain that helps control excessive caloric intake, was only discovered in 1994 at Rockefeller University.

It's becoming more obvious that fat is not a by-product of individual greed and guilt but rather an active

organ in its own right, worthy of a significant scientific effort to uncover its complex chemical and biological mysteries. Being obese doesn't mean you're a bad person, but it virtually guarantees bad health, and that can't be ignored. Obese individuals have a higher-than-normal rate of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high lipids, cardiovascular disease, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, strokes, respiratory disease, and some types of cancers.

Obesity isn't a condition we should accept and adapt to. Before we continue on this path, investing in the problem rather than the solution, it's time to identify a different approach: How can scientists help the lipid cell adjust to population-wide over-nourishment? How can we promote decreased quantity and increased quality in the American diet? How do we get Americans outdoors again? Why are children, women, and minorities targets for obesity? And, is investment in gastric bypass surgery, wider ferry seats, ambulance winches, and bigger caskets really the way to go? I know the answer—it's a resounding "no."

For more information on obesity, or to receive a free weekly health report from Dr. Magee, go online to [www.HealthPolitics.com](http://www.HealthPolitics.com).

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