

# Health Problems

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the topic of health problems in society, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Obesity
2. Eating Disorders
3. AIDS

## 1. OBESITY

There are several notable health problems in American society, particularly obesity. **Obesity** is unhealthiness that results from carrying too much weight and fat. It is measured using the **body mass index**, which is an overall picture of body size, determined by comparing body weight to body height.

Culturally, obesity is very stigmatized in American society, yet despite this, it is a bigger problem in the U.S. than in other countries of similar socioeconomic standing. In this country, poor people tend to be more obese than wealthier people. Wealth and cultural aspects might help to explain why this is the case:

- *Access and leisure time:* Wealthier people can afford to work out at gyms, and often they can afford to have more leisure time which allows them to do things like exercise and running.
- *Cultural values:* Culturally, wealthier people value exercise as leisure, more so than poor people.
- *Cost:* If you want to go to buy only vegetables, fruit, and meat--referred to as shopping the perimeter of the grocery store, where all of the real, natural, unprocessed food is located--then it will likely cost a lot of money. It's much cheaper to buy the processed, industrial food in the center of the grocery store. Poor people don't have the same resources as wealthy people to spend on food that's actually good for you.

All of these factors affect the differential rates of obesity, which is an issue of importance for social epidemiology--the study of how disease, health and issues like obesity are disproportionately spread throughout the population.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Obesity

A state of unhealthiness from carrying too much weight and fat.

## Body Mass Index (BMI)

A calculation which judges body weight by comparing it to height.

# 2. EATING DISORDERS

Because society stigmatizes obesity so much in this country, **eating disorders** result. People put tremendous pressure on themselves to be thin in our culture, and our culture places a premium on being thin. This can cause people to have eating disorders, which are abnormal eating habits involving excessive behaviors as well as psychological instability.

Anorexia and bulimia are the two prominent eating disorders in American society. Anorexia occurs when you deprive yourself of food, and bulimia occurs when you eat food but then throw up and regurgitate right away so you don't actually retain that nutrition. Typically, in the past, eating disorders have been a gendered problem that has disproportionately affected women, because the culture has placed more of a premium on the ideal of women's beauty and thinness. However, now this is changing.

### IN CONTEXT

Recent press has discussed the increasing rates of male eating disorders in this country. As males are becoming increasingly concerned about appearance in postmodern culture and society, they're become more feminized, meaning the categories of gender are starting to become more blurred.

Things typically considered to be feminine are now adopted by males, which has caused males to feel those pressures and the cultural stigma of maintaining a certain appearance and looking thin. Things typically forced on females are now becoming the domain of men as well. Therefore, men are starting to exhibit an increase in eating disorders.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Eating Disorder

Abnormal eating habits which involve excessive behaviors and and psychological instability.

# 3. AIDS

Another health problem in the United States, and also in the global perspective, is **AIDS**. **AIDS** is the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome that attacks the human body's immune system. People don't often die from AIDS itself, but rather due to the fact that AIDS weakens the immune system and prevents people from fighting off any illnesses. This causes affected people to become very weak, and they generally die from some other cause.

### IN CONTEXT

You can contract AIDS through sexual transmission, or it can be transmitted through blood, which can happen when people share needles. AIDS is a global and United States health problem, and

AIDS treatment is very expensive.

People in poorer countries in Africa are generally the biggest victims of AIDS because they lack both the educational resources to become aware of the dangers of AIDS and the medical institutions that are needed to provide adequate care.

This combination makes it such that a lot of people don't even know that they carry the disease. Even in America, estimates are that only 80% of the people that have AIDS--four out of five--actually know that they have it. This means that one in five people infected with the disease don't know that they have AIDS.

Even though AIDS disproportionately affects poorer countries and people in Africa, it is wrong to say that it's only a problem for poorer countries. In fact, rates of HIV and AIDS have been increasing in the United States. The CDC estimates that 1.2 million people living in the United States have AIDS. Washington, D.C. has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in this country.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### AIDS

The acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a disease that attacks the body's immune system.



#### SUMMARY

Today you learned about health problems affecting American society, focusing on **obesity**, **eating disorders**, and **AIDS**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### AIDS

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##### Body Mass Index (BMI)

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##### Eating Disorder

Abnormal eating habits which involve excessive behaviors and psychological instability.

##### Obesity

A state of unhealthiness from carrying too much weight and fat.