

Obesity: Individual problem or social problem?

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally, with millions of people dying each year due to excess weight or obesity. Although the health sciences community has seemingly always been concerned with the health of the population and worked hard to identify conditions that affect human health and alleviate suffering, the contemporary pathologization of obesity, which has historically even been considered a sign of health and social power (Figure 1), began in the late 1950s following studies carried out by life insurance companies. Since then, many studies have linked excess weight to an increased risk of diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease, which led the World Health Organization to declare a global epidemic of obesity. Obviously, the fight against obesity has been included in health promotion strategies. Even during the conception of collective health strategies, the fight against obesity has always been understood as the responsibility of the individual for his or her well-being. However, the time when obesity was considered as simply an individual health problem seems to be gone. New and dangerous discourses about the obese emphasize that they not only harm themselves but the community as a whole, because the direct and indirect health costs related to obesity are shared by everyone. In addition, obesity has been associated with losses in productivity and other discourses that could potentially fuel prejudice towards overweight people. What should be done? Getting fat is incredibly easy!

For many years, the food industry has encouraged the consumption of processed and ultra-processed food in large quantities and in family-sized packaging, under the premise that this arrangement is more economical. Currently, following the introduction of new medications for the treatment of diabetes and obesity, the impact on consumption is so great that the ingestion of family-sized foods is decreasing, and certain food companies are losing money for the first time. In other words, we are moving from a beginning marked by the pathologization of obesity due to a need for profit by life insurance companies, through the strengthening of scientific evidence from the health sciences about the negative consequences of obesity, to the reinvention of food companies that are suffering the impact of modern treatments against obesity. It is incredible how it seems that the wheel always revolves around money and the discourse that the collective is more important than the individual. Even when these situations seem to occur just for temporary convenience.



Figure 1. Brazil. 6,400 Reis, 1810/1 R. 14,34 g Gold (.917) Laureate bust of Prince Regent John facing right, legend around, with date and mintmark R (Rio de Janeiro 1694-date) below. Overdate 1810/1. Reverse: Crowned Portuguese arms topped by royal crown. KM# 236.1

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