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Obesity could be catching

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3 February, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Obesity could be catching

Scientists have found evidence to suggest that certain forms of obesity could come from a virus and be contagious in the same way as the common cold. Researchers looking into this theory have revealed that simply washing your hands could be a preventative measure to avoid obesity. This rudimentary practice could improve the lives of millions around the world. This unlikely proposition was made by Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin. She determined that a human virus, called adenovirus AD-37, causes obesity in chickens and could be responsible for the similar condition in humans. She said: "The nearly simultaneous increase in obesity in most countries is difficult to explain by changes in food intake and exercise alone, and suggest that adenoviruses could have contributed."

The notion that viruses could lead to obesity has been a contentious one among scientists for many years. Dr. Whigham is convinced that factors other than poor diet or lack of exercise may play their part in making people unhealthily overweight. Testing is still in its preliminary stages and further research is needed to ascertain sufficient data to verify her claims. Dr. Whigham lamented that research was currently retrained by ethical considerations: "We do not have cause-and-effect data in humans - you cannot ethically do the experiments for that kind of data: infect humans and see if they get fat," she said. She concluded: "The role of adenoviruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is a critical question that demands additional research."

WARM-UPS

1. MY WEIGHT: In pairs / groups, talk about your weight. How has it varied over the years? Do you weigh yourself every day? Do you ever worry about your weight? What is your ideal weight?

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Scientists / evidence / obesity / virus / washing your hands / chickens / food intake / exercise / contentious issues / diet / testing / ethics / data / epidemics / research

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. PREDICTION: Talk with your partner(s) about what you think the article will be about. Use the words in the “chat” section above to help you. Change partners and share and compare your predictions.

4. HEADLINES: In pairs / groups, talk about these “headlines”. Develop the stories. How possible do you think it is that they might become real? What would be the consequences of the things in the headlines actually happening?

- a. Cure for obesity found
- b. Successful diet pill found
- c. Half of world population obese
- d. Airlines and trains to base ticket prices on body weight
- e. High cholesterol food banned
- f. Fat people found to live longer
- g. Obesity becomes a thing of the past
- h. Government passes health law – obesity is illegal

5. FAT: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word “fat”. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. DIFFICULTIES: Talk about the difficulties obese people face in their daily lives. Use these words to help your conversations:

- Food shopping
- Exercise
- Job hunting
- Shopping for clothes
- Transportation
- Thin people
- Bathroom scales
- Eating

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Scientists have claimed obesity can be caught from a virus. | T / F |
| b. Washing your hands could be one way to avoid becoming obese. | T / F |
| c. Eating chicken can lead to obesity. | T / F |
| d. There is a near simultaneous increase in obesity in most countries. | T / F |
| e. The notion of an obesity-causing virus is a very new one. | T / F |
| f. Testing of the theory is in its advanced stages. | T / F |
| g. It is unethical to conduct experiments that involve making people fat. | T / F |
| h. Obesity is a global epidemic. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| a. contagious | basic |
| b. preventative | debatable |
| c. rudimentary | all-important |
| d. simultaneous | considerations |
| e. intake | consumption |
| f. contentious | concurrent |
| g. factors | initial |
| h. preliminary | substantiate |
| i. verify | catching |
| j. critical | preemptive |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. contagious in the same way | causes obesity in chickens |
| b. simply washing your hands | by ethical considerations |
| c. This rudimentary practice could | among scientists for many years |
| d. adenovirus AD-37 | could be a preventative measure |
| e. The nearly simultaneous | in its preliminary stages |
| f. a contentious one | improve the lives of millions |
| g. factors other | as the common cold |
| h. Testing is still | additional research |
| i. research was currently retrained | than poor diet... |
| j. a critical question that demands | increase in obesity |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Obesity could be catching

Scientists have found evidence to suggest that _____ forms of obesity could come from a virus and be _____ in the same way as the common cold. Researchers looking into this theory have revealed that simply washing your hands could be a preventative _____ to avoid obesity. This rudimentary _____ could improve the lives of millions around the world. This unlikely _____ was made by Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin. She determined that a human virus, called adenovirus AD-37, causes obesity in chickens and could be _____ for the similar condition in humans. She said: "The nearly _____ increase in obesity in most countries is difficult to explain by changes in food _____ and exercise alone, and suggest that adenoviruses could have contributed."

simultaneous

certain

responsible

practice

intake

contagious

proposition

measure

The _____ that viruses could lead to obesity has been a _____ one among scientists for many years. Dr. Whigham is convinced that factors _____ than poor diet or lack of exercise may play their part in making people unhealthily overweight. Testing is still in its preliminary stages and further research is needed to _____ sufficient data to verify her claims. Dr. Whigham lamented that research was currently _____ by ethical considerations: "We do not have cause-and-effect data in humans - you cannot _____ do the experiments for that kind of data: _____ humans and see if they get fat," she said. She concluded: "The role of adenoviruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is a _____ question that demands additional research."

ethically

ascertain

contentious

critical

retrained

notion

infect

other

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Obesity could be catching

Scientists have found evidence to suggest that _____ forms of obesity could come from a virus and be _____ in the same way as the common cold. Researchers looking into this theory have revealed that simply washing your hands could be a _____ measure to avoid obesity. This rudimentary practice could improve the lives of millions around the world. This unlikely _____ was made by Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin. She determined that a human virus, called adenovirus AD-37, causes obesity in chickens and could be responsible for the similar condition in humans. She said: "The nearly _____ increase in obesity in most countries is difficult to explain by changes in food intake and exercise alone, and suggest that adenoviruses could have _____."

The notion that viruses could lead to obesity has been a _____ one among scientists for many years. Dr. Whigham is convinced that factors other than poor diet or lack of exercise may play their part in making people unhealthily overweight. Testing is still in its _____ stages and further research is needed to _____ sufficient data to verify her claims. Dr. Whigham lamented that research was currently retrained by ethical considerations: "We do not have cause-and-effect data in humans - you cannot _____ do the experiments for that kind of data: infect humans and see if they get fat," she said. She concluded: "The role of adenoviruses in the worldwide _____ of obesity is a _____ question that demands additional research."

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**common**' and '**cold**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "OBESITY" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about viruses and obesity.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| • suggest | • contentious |
| • common | • poor |
| • measure | • ascertain |
| • practice | • lamented |
| • condition | • ethically |
| • alone | • critical |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you think obesity could be a virus?
- c. Do you think it's possible that other conditions, such as depression or absent-mindedness, could also be due to viruses?
- d. Do you think scientists will soon be able to cure obesity?
- e. What do you think of the fact that obesity is a global epidemic?
- f. What do you think will happen to the average weight of people in the future?
- g. Do you think you could catch the obesity virus?
- h. Do you worry about your weight?
- i. What problems do obese people have?
- j. What does your government do to encourage people to maintain a healthy weight?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think it's possible for obesity to be contagious?
- d. How often do you wash your hands?
- e. Do you think obesity is a largely forgotten about epidemic?
- f. Do you think increasing levels of obesity could eventually decrease longevity rates?
- g. Are you surprised that obesity exists in most countries?
- h. Do you think it is ethical to try and infect people with an obesity virus to see if they get fat?
- i. Do you think society's view of obesity will change?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

LARGE LIFE: Look at this list of difficulties that obese people may encounter. In pairs / groups, discuss how much of a problem these points might be. Decide what should be done about them and think of solutions.

DIFFICULTIES	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
Shopping for clothes		
Job hunting		
Exercise		
Using airplanes		
Being taunted		
"Thin" advertising		
Medical / Life insurance		
Other _____		

Change partners and share and compare your ideas.

What do you think people who are obese would think of the solutions?

Whose responsibility is obesity – the individual's or the government's?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on obesity. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. OBESITY: Write an essay on the causes and effects of obesity in your country. What are the remedies to this epidemic? Read your essays to your partner(s) in your next class. Did you all write about similar things?

4. MY DIET: Make a record of the things you eat on a daily or weekly basis. Justify your reasons for eating or drinking these things. Determine whether or not you can live without the different foods and drinks you consume. Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. T c. F d. T e. F f. F g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| a. contagious | catching |
| b. preventative | preemptive |
| c. rudimentary | basic |
| d. simultaneous | concurrent |
| e. intake | consumption |
| f. contentious | debatable |
| g. factors | considerations |
| h. preliminary | initial |
| i. verify | substantiate |
| j. critical | all-important |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. contagious in the same way | as the common cold |
| b. simply washing your hands | could be a preventative measure |
| c. This rudimentary practice could | improve the lives of millions |
| d. adenovirus AD-37 | causes obesity in chickens |
| e. The nearly simultaneous | increase in obesity |
| f. a contentious one | among scientists for many years |
| g. factors other | than poor diet... |
| h. Testing is still | in its preliminary stages |
| i. research was currently retrained | by ethical considerations |
| j. a critical question that demands | additional research |

GAP FILL:

Obesity could be catching

Scientists have found evidence to suggest that **certain** forms of obesity could come from a virus and be **contagious** in the same way as the common cold. Researchers looking into this theory have revealed that simply washing your hands could be a preventative **measure**. This rudimentary **practice** could improve the lives of millions around the world. This unlikely **proposition** was made by Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin. She determined that a human virus, called adenovirus AD-37, causes obesity in chickens and could be **responsible** for the similar condition in humans. She said: "The nearly **simultaneous** increase in obesity in most countries is difficult to explain by changes in food **intake** and exercise alone, and suggest that adenoviruses could have contributed."

The **notion** that viruses could lead to obesity has been a **contentious** one among scientists for many years. Dr. Whigham is convinced that factors **other** than poor diet or lack of exercise may play their part in making people unhealthily overweight. Testing is still in its preliminary stages and further research is needed to **ascertain** sufficient data to verify her claims. Dr. Whigham lamented that research was currently **retrained** by ethical considerations: "We do not have cause-and-effect data in humans - you cannot **ethically** do the experiments for that kind of data: **infect** humans and see if they get fat," she said. She concluded: "The role of adenoviruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is a **critical** question that demands additional research."