The Obesity Epidemic

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Dietz] Obesity costs this country about $150 billion a year, or almost 10 percent of the national medical budget. Approximately one in three adults and one in six children are obese. Obesity is epidemic in the United States today and a major cause of death, attributable to heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

[Announcer] CDC Presents: Health Matters.

[Dr. Dietz] At its simplest, obesity results from people consuming more calories than their bodies burn, but it's a more complex problem than that. People didn't decide to become overweight. Their weight gain is a consequence of complicated changes in the environment, where food is more readily available and opportunities for physical activity are lacking.

[Dr. O'Toole] Societal, economic, cultural conditions have all contributed to the rise in obesity.

[Dr. Moore] One contributing factor is the fact that the way we eat has changed over the last 50 years. Americans are eating more processed foods and eating out a lot more frequently. The foods that are offered in restaurants, snack shops, and in vending machines are higher in sugar, calories, and fat than what we typically prepare in our own homes. We are surrounded by food. We're constantly bombarded by it. We're consuming larger portion sizes and more calories than ever before. Another factor is that people who live in poor and rural communities may have less access to quality grocery stores that sell healthy and affordable options. In these areas, it might be easier and cheaper for residents to purchase less healthy foods and beverages.

[Dr. O'Toole] Other factors, such as technology and the way we build our communities has influenced our lives. Both of these factors have left us more sedentary. Families must drive to work and school because it's often too far to walk. Many communities are built in ways that simply make it difficult or unsafe to be physically active. For many families, safe routes for walking and biking to school or play may not even exist. Getting to parks and recreation centers may be difficult, and public transportation may not even be available. And we spend a lot of time sitting in front of screens for work and for entertainment. Also, too few students get daily quality physical education in schools.

[Dr. Moore] There is no single or simple solution to the obesity epidemic. It's going to take solutions at many levels in order to resolve the epidemic. What can each of us do as individuals to be healthier? First, we can eat more fruits and vegetables and fewer foods that are higher in fat and sugar. We can also drink more water instead of sugared drinks. Everyone, including adults of all ages and ability levels and children, need to get the recommended amount of physical activity. Parents can listen to their pediatricians and

restrict television viewing for their young children to less than two hours a day, and we cannot put televisions in our children's bedrooms. How can we work together as communities to resolve the obesity epidemic? Communities can expand access to fruits and vegetables through farmers-markets programs like this one in Brownsville, Texas.

[Dr. Gowen] The market was designed for the sole intent of reducing obesity rates and improving diabetes rates in our community. There is a wide range of people who come to the market from different walks of life.

[Dr. Martin] Low-income families, who may not be able to afford some of the fruits and vegetables – the voucher program has been very instrumental.

[Dr. Moore] Communities can also advocate for quality nutrition programs and physical education in their school systems. One way to do that is through school health advisory councils.

[Adrienne Udarbe] The school health advisory council is something that doesn't cost any money and it is a relatively little amount of time, and it brings together a diverse group of people from the community and the schools.

[Child] I like to be healthy because I want to be big and strong.

[Adrienne Udarbe] Because schools face so much pressure to try to do so many other things, the school health advisory council is the perfect way for schools to achieve this.

[Dr. O'Toole] Local governments and communities can play an important role in developing environments that encourage and support active living. They can increase opportunities for physical activity by encouraging mixed-use development to allow for easy access to schools, businesses, parks, and grocery stores. They can implement traffic-safety measures and crime-prevention strategies. Building bike paths, sidewalks and crosswalks will foster safe and easy access to more physical activity. States and local governments can provide incentives to existing markets to offer healthier food, and they can also provide incentives for new businesses to establish their supermarkets in low income areas.

[Woman] The quality of the produce is much better and, of course, it's less expensive than at the corner stores, and it is very helpful to the neighborhood, I think, to, overall, be a more healthier neighborhood.

[Man] I had lived in Philadelphia all my life, and I had never – there never was a market like this around here that we can walk to, that's a convenience and, on top of that, healthy foods.

[Dr. O'Toole] Employers can offer work-site health programs that offer a variety of options for their employees, such as this program in Austin, Texas.

[Debra Teague] This used to just be a place to come to work and go home, and now it's a place where you can come and get in your workout and get in your support group for your weight loss. And instead of just going to the short order cook and having a burger and fries, you can have a nice healthier sandwich, and that's – that's made a difference.

[Dr. O'Toole] In addition, employers can make it easier for women to continue breast-feeding when they return to work because babies who are breast-fed are less likely to become overweight later in life.

[Dr. Dietz] There is no simple solution to the obesity epidemic. People need to make better choices, but we also have to change those choices in our schools, in our child-care settings, in our work sites, and in our communities.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.