

OBESITY in the UK

'Obesity' is the term used by health officials to describe a person whose body fat is at a level which can cause them serious health problems. In other words, a person who is 'obese' is dangerously **overweight**. Sadly, recent reports show that a third of all children and teenagers in the UK between the ages of two and fifteen are now 'officially obese' – the highest level ever. In addition, the age at which they are becoming obese is getting lower.

Obesity can lead to **medical conditions** such as heart disease and diabetes and doctors now know that there is also a direct link between obesity and **depression** – so the problem not only affects people's physical health, but their **mental health** too. The cost of **treating** weight-related conditions is more than £5 billion a year, which is one reason why the UK's National Health Service is having problems coping with the demand for hospital places and trained medical staff.

So why is the situation getting worse? One problem is that we aren't getting enough exercise. Experts recommend that adults get at least 150 minutes of exercise every week – that amounts to just half an hour every day for five days. However, surveys show that only 53 percent of the adult population do that amount of exercise, and as people don't always tell the truth in surveys like this, it's possible that the real numbers are even lower.

The figures for children are even more worrying. While medical experts recommend that children over the age of five should do

at least one hour of exercise a day, only 15 percent of girls and 22 percent of boys get this amount. At the same time children and teenagers are consuming more calories, especially in the form of sugar. A single can of soft drink contains more sugar than the recommended amount for an entire day! Furthermore, working parents don't often have time to cook meals using fresh ingredients and are tempted by cheap packaged food which is **filling** but contains **few nutrients** and is often high in salt, fat and sugar.

So, what are the solutions? One idea suggested by government experts is a 'sugar tax'. This makes the price of fizzy drinks higher, and will lead to a fall in demand for these products. At the same time it has forced manufacturers to reduce the amount of sugar in their products. The government will spend the tax money on sports programmes in schools and school breakfast clubs with healthy food options.

At the same time, schools are trying to increase the amount of exercise that children do. Most schools offer about two hours of P.E. a week and it is often difficult to increase this because of the need to study other subjects. However, some schools are now trying to persuade students to have active breaks, rather than sitting in corridors looking at their phones, and they are also offering more after-school sports activities for those who are interested.

The problem of obesity is one that schools, parents, governments, health officials, and most of all, individuals must try and overcome by working together to find solutions.

1 Read the text quickly and match the numbers from the box with what they refer to.

1/3 5 billion 150 22 2

- 1** The percentage of boys who do the recommended amount of exercise. 22
- 2** The amount of exercise an adult should do per week in minutes. 150
- 3** The number of hours of P.E. that most school pupils do every week. 1/3
- 4** The cost of obesity to the National Health Service each year in pounds. 5 billion
- 5** The proportion of children aged two to fifteen who are obese. 2

2 Read the text again and choose the correct answers.

- 1** According to the writer,
 - a** more young people are overweight compared to the past.
 - b** more young people are overweight than adults.
 - c** obesity is a problem that mainly affects 2-15 year olds.
- 2** One problem the writer identifies is that
 - a** some medical staff are unable to work because of obesity.
 - b** medical staff are depressed because of the situation.
 - c** obesity can also cause psychological problems.
- 3** The writer's view of packaged food is that
 - a** it doesn't fill people up as much as 'real' food.
 - b** it contains too many unhealthy ingredients.
 - c** parents give it to their children because they don't know how to cook.
- 4** The government has introduced a law which
 - a** forces students to take part in active after-school activities.
 - b** increases the number of hours of P.E. students have a week.
 - c** raises the price of unhealthy drinks so that people drink less of them.
- 5** In the article, the author
 - a** explains the reasons for obesity and what can be done to improve the situation.
 - b** blames parents for not caring enough about their children's diet.
 - c** criticises the government for not doing more to deal with the problem of obesity.