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The Severe Obesity Crisis of Kuwait

While obesity and its accompanying diseases have become increasingly apparent in the United States in recent years, with companies like CrossFit and Weight Watchers sending their message into the commercial world, the American diet has had massive negative effects on the health of developing nations by introducing fast food to these fragile economies and their trusting populations. Kuwait has felt the heavy weight of their McDonald's infatuation in recent years, as nearly 43% of the population is obese, and that number is expected to multiply by 1.5 by 2020. These levels of obesity can lead to life threatening health issues for adults and high risks for respiratory diseases and social challenges for kids. However, the citizens of Kuwait are not given a chance at a healthy lifestyle, seeing that the climate is intensely hot and dry and there is a very limited number of exercise and fitness programs available. Through free programs for adults to educate themselves on their health, requiring all public schools to put children through comprehensive fitness classes, and making exercise and nutritious food more accessible throughout the country, Kuwait can become a more successful nation in lowering the obesity rate.

Following the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991, Kuwait was left war-torn and penniless. Invaded by Saddam Hussein, Kuwait was the battle ground of multiple military operations including the US, Egypt, and the UK. Since then, the middle eastern country's economy has flourished, and their petroleum business has held a steady up-and-up economy. However, in the 90's Kuwaitis were hurting, desperate for a financial break and hungry. The first McDonald's opened on Gulf road in June of 1994. In the past 35 years, the middle-eastern country's economy has flourished, and is now one of the wealthiest companies in the world, per capita, according to the World Factbook. Due to the fact that Kuwait holds more that 6% of the world's total oil, they have built an economy based around the bubbling business. Now, with a rich economy, the American fast food business is bustling, but the citizens of Kuwait are finding themselves in a deep battle with their own bodies.

Many Kuwaitis site eating at fast food restaurants 2-3 times a week, a major problem for the population's cardiovascular and respiratory systems. Wendy's, which has 6 locations in Kuwait, roughly the size of Massachusetts, most popular item is the Baconator, weighing in at 950 calories and 1630 mg of sodium. The American Heart Association says the ideal sodium intake for adults should be "no more than 1500 mg per day." Consuming too much sodium in a day can lead to Hypertension, which according to University of Vermont professor Rachel Johnson can increase your risk for some cancers, heart failure, and many other diseases. Salt isn't the only factor affecting the population of Kuwait's life expectancy; sugar has infiltrated diets and is the killer many overlook. A Burger King Vanilla shake will put you back 85g of sugar, more than 45 more grams of added sugar than recommended by Healthline. According to Mayo Clinic, too much added sugar can result in respiratory diseases, heart failure, tooth decay, and other life threatening conditions. Evidently, the fast food Kuwaitis are consuming will lead to major health problems in their future.

The fast food dangers stretch beyond Kuwaiti adults. According to a 2015 study by 4 scientists, 36.5% of Kuwait's children were obese, 25.5% overweight. The study also found significant correlations between obesity levels and the amount of children eating fast food. Myhealth.alberta.ca, in their 2018 article Healthy Eating in Children: Problems Caused by Poor Nutrition, sites that having an unhealthy diet can lead to the development of cardiovascular diseases later on in life, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and atherosclerosis. According to the Childhood Obesity Foundation, not only can childhood obesity lead to type 2 diabetes, liver disease, and bone and joint problems, but can also lead to eating disorders, sleeping disorders, early puberty, and a higher risk of bullying in school. The frequency with which the Kuwaiti population are eating fast food is extremely detrimental to their health, and the health and success of future generations.

Further, the Kuwaiti people recognize that size of their population is unhealthy, but have little to no resources or education to properly do anything about it. In fact, the first road race, ranging from 10k to 42k, internationally recognized in Kuwait was only started in 2015. The Gulf Bank 642 aims to educate it's runners on Diabetes and how exercise can reduce the risk for the growing problem in the country. According to Business Insider article, 1.4 Billion People are Putting Themselves at Risk for Disease by Not Exercising Enough, According to a New Report- Here's What You Should be Doing, "more than 50% of adults don't get enough exercise," when speaking of Kuwait. The article also sites that 75 minutes of aerobic exercise a week is sufficient to meet the quota. Because of this, it becomes apparent that Kuwait has truly been affected by the car-culture, and 75 minutes of jogging or swimming is out of the question. Adults have also admitted that the general population doesn't see a problem with the fast food obsession. In a CNN.com article, marathon runner Rania al Mutawa states that "the average Kuwaiti does not

know what goes into that type of food. It's just like a home cooked meal." Because of this, it is evident that adults need accessible education on staying healthy and developing lifelong, positive lifestyle habits.

The last reason the obesity crisis in Kuwait needs to be solved is that the solutions the medical professionals currently in use should be a last resort, not the societal norm. According to Mnn.com article, In Kuwait, 88% Overweight and Stomach Stapling Becomes the Norm, Doctor Osamah Al Sanea, 5,000 stomach stapling surgeries occur each year in Kuwait, though only 20 bariatric surgeons reside in the country. But, any surgery is dangerous and should be avoided if possible. According to Livestrong.com, .5% of these surgeries result in the death of the patient, and other side effects such as hair loss, mood swings, and fatigue. Further, over 50% of vertical banded gastroplasties result in the patient regaining a significant amount of weight in the long term, according to the 2015 study "Long Term Results of Primary Vertical Banded Gastroplasty.". Because of the unsafety and high failure rate of these surgeries, a new solution for the obesity of Kuwait needs to replace the vertical banded gastroplasties.

One way to solve Kuwait's obesity problem would be to introduce free health and fitness programs to the community. These would have a comprehensive, functional curriculum taught by certified teachers and instructors. Of course, this wouldn't be free for the government. To pay teachers, a tax could be added, not unsimilar to a public school teacher's salary. Just by introducing one health education center for every 10 square miles in Kuwait City, the country's largest city, pulling in 77.2 square miles, and one center in the next 9 biggest cities, Kuwait could immensely improve their obesity problem by educating adults. With multiple GED education centers already in Kuwait, 5 in Kuwait City alone, according to LearnPick.com, adding health classes would be a matter of hiring teachers, making curriculum, and getting resources, completely eliminating the need to build new buildings. By taxing the Kuwait population, the country can formulate comprehensive curriculum for health education for the obese and general population.

Another way to solve Kuwait's obesity crisis is to introduce health and fitness classes to children in schools. According to Expat Focus, around 20% of the population of Kuwait is schoolchildren, and all schools, including public and private schools, teach a standard curriculum. Because of the high rate of which the education in Kuwait is reaching, providing mandatory healthy lifestyle classes like the ones aforementioned would very likely decrease the risk of obesity in adulthood. A study, titled "Involved Students in "Hands On" Projects Such as Research, Case Studies, or Real-Life Activities" says that students involved with active learning have an increased motivation for learning and retain more information. By requiring all schools

receiving government subsidy, including all public schools and most private, Arabic schools, according to Expat Focus, the majority of school-age children in Kuwait can receive free health and fitness classes with the goal of giving them lifelong strategies for a prosperous lifestyle.

The last way to resist the growing number of overweight and obese adults in Kuwait is to make fresh produce and non-GMO foods more readily available for everyone. According to Fox4kc.com, a Kansas City non-profit called Kanbe's Market stocks convenience stores in underprivileged areas with fresh foods with the goal of getting food to citizens that normally wouldn't have the means to get it. Max Kaniger, owner of the non-profit, says that the company "will have delivered 250,000 pounds of fresh groceries by the time the year(2018) ends." By implementing fresh produce with systems like this one, Kuwaitis will have better access to fresh foods and be better exposed to a healthy lifestyle. According to CNN article "If You See it, You'll Eat it, Expert Says," Brian Wansink, author and professor, says that humans are more likely to eat what is readily available. With this in mind, putting "healthier" foods like fruits, vegetables, whole-wheat grains, and meat in grocery stores and markets, besides McDonald's and Burger King, will greatly increase Kuwait's probability to eat healthier.

Ideally, the implementation of these systems would take place over a very quick timeline, as the situation is so dire and a longer wait period between signing the bill into law and fulfillment will result in more terrible cases of preventable disease. As mentioned before, as a way to fund the new systems that would be put in place, a tax would be placed upon the citizens of Kuwait as part of the money going to infrastructure and education. While the specifics of this tax must be made by government officials, this change should be made within a year. After money has been collected to create real change for the citizens, the first step should be to implement comprehensive health and physical education programs in schools. As mentioned before, similar systems exist in other countries, so this should not be very strenuous. With leftover resources, construction of the adult education centers can start. At this point in the process, things could very likely get stalled, but with vigilance, these steps should realistically be able to take place in 3-4 years. Last, with any leftover funds throughout the second step and then after, creating access to healthy, fresh foods for Kuwaitis can begin. While this will likely take more entrepreneurship and work from individual citizens in conjunction with the government, this process can be expected to take around 5 years. In conclusion, between the taxing, building of youth and adult education programs, and development of food programs, the process of implementing these health changes to Kuwait can take between 8 and 10 years.

The obesity crisis in Kuwait has been developing since the First Gulf War, with the introduction of American fast food. Since then, more than 40% of Kuwaiti adults have become obese, and

more than 80% are overweight. Obesity can lead to many life-threatening heart diseases, immune deficiencies, and other dietary diseases in adults. The effects can be even worse in children, who are at an increased risk for social issues in schools and other adolescent conditions. However, with the introduction of free health classes for adults at GED centers, mandatory fitness classes for kids in government funded schools, and making healthy foods more accessible for the population, we can not only combat the obesity crisis in Kuwait, but work to better the health of the entire world.

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