

## Diet and Exercise Hold Key to Beating Obesity

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ABU DHABI — Diet modification, exercise programme and behavioural approach are the first line of defence against obesity according to health experts at the 'A-Z of Obesity Treatment' conference in Abu Dhabi on Saturday stressed the importance of exercise in the treatment of obesity.

"Integrated approaches that include moderate diet modification, an exercise programme and a behavioural approach are more effective, especially for mildly to moderately overweight persons," said Dr Zujajah Hassan, Chairperson of Primary Health Care at Baniyas Clinic and Al Nahda Clinic in Abu Dhabi.

Hassan said the involvement and encouragement of the primary physicians are critical in implementing a comprehensive weight loss programme for a patient. She advised primary physicians to refer overweight patients to dietician who can help alter their eating habits. "Restrict the use of very low caloric diet to patients more than 30 to 40 per cent above their ideal weight under medical supervision."

Hassan also advised a 30-45 minute of moderate paced walking three to five times a week as a good starting treatment. Maintain weight loss by doing a moderate intense physical activity of 60-90 minutes a day, she said.

"Exercise may also benefit dieters by increasing feeling of self-control, reducing stress, improving appearance and alleviating depression. Cardiovascular morbidity and mortality may also be reduced," she added.

A survey conducted by HAAD in 2003 showed that 40 per cent of young adults in Abu Dhabi are not exercising. In 2005, 40 per cent of children between the ages of 13 to 15 spend three hours sitting down, according to Dr Cother Hajat, Section Head for the Public Health Programmes at the Health Authority-Abu Dhabi (HAAD).

The primary causes of obesity are psychological, biological, genetic, social and occupational factors Hassan noted. Psychological complications such as emotional distress, discrimination and social stigmatisation are the results of obesity and she suggested consulting a psychiatrist if the emotional problem is too great.

She added that drug intervention should be reserved only for patients who have very high risk of cardiovascular metabolic or orthopaedic morbidity and surgical therapy for only those with life-threatening obesity who have failed all other measures.

Obesity is a major problem in the UAE with 60 per cent of Emirati nationals is overweight. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UAE ranks 10<sup>th</sup> among countries with overweight people.

(Khaleej Times)