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Obesity could be catching

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Contents

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
Listening Gap Fill	6
After Reading	7
Discussion	8
Speaking	9
Homework	10
Answers	11

3 February, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Obesity could be catching

A new report into obesity shows that being overweight could be catching. Scientists have discovered an obesity virus that might be as easy to catch as a cold. American researchers say that washing your hands could be one way to kill the virus and avoid becoming overweight. Basic hygiene could improve the lives of millions of people around the world. Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin did research on a human virus that caused obesity in chickens. She believes it could also make humans fat. She also believes the virus exists in most countries around the world.

Scientists have discussed the idea that a virus could lead to obesity for many years. Dr. Whigham is positive that other factors make people overweight, not just a poor diet or lack of exercise. She said testing is still in the early stages and more research is needed to prove her theory. However, research into the virus causing obesity is difficult. Dr. Whigham said: "You cannot ethically do experiments...that infect humans and see if they get fat". She concluded: "The role of viruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is [an important] question that demands additional research."

WARM-UPS

1. MY WEIGHT: In pairs / groups, talk about your weight. How has it changed 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.

Reports / being overweight / viruses / washing your hands / basic hygiene / chickens / scientists / poor diets / exercise / ethics / experiments / epidemics

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 say obesity can be caught from a virus. | T / F |
| b. Washing your hands could be one way to stay thin. | T / F |
| c. Eating chicken can lead to obesity. | T / F |
| d. Obesity exists in most countries. | T / F |
| e. The idea that a virus might cause obesity is a very new one. | T / F |
| f. Testing of the idea 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. report | morally |
| b. catching | led to |
| c. avoid | initial |
| d. basic | things |
| e. caused | extra |
| f. idea | contagious |
| g. factors | simple |
| h. early | notion |
| i. ethically | keep away from |
| j. additional | study |

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

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a. being overweight | make people overweight |
| b. be as easy to | of people around the world |
| c. washing your hands could be | that demands additional research |
| d. improve the lives of millions | in the early stages |
| e. a human virus | could be catching |
| f. positive that other factors | that caused obesity in chickens |
| g. testing is still | experiments that infect humans |
| h. research into the virus | catch as a cold |
| i. You cannot ethically do | causing obesity is difficult |
| j. an important question | one way to kill the virus |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

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

Obesity could be catching

A new _____ into obesity shows that being overweight could be catching. Scientists have discovered an obesity virus that might be as easy to _____ as a cold. American researchers say that washing your hands could be one _____ to kill the virus and _____ becoming overweight. Basic _____ could improve the lives of millions of people around the world. Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin did _____ on a human virus that caused obesity in chickens. She believes it could also _____ humans fat. She also believes the virus _____ in most countries around the world.

hygiene

way

make

avoid

exists

report

research

catch

Scientists have discussed the _____ that a virus could lead to obesity for many years. Dr. Whigham is positive that other _____ make people overweight, not just a poor diet or _____ of exercise. She said testing is still in the early _____ and more research is needed to prove her _____. However, research into the virus causing obesity is difficult. Dr. Whigham said: "You cannot _____ do experiments...that infect humans and see if they get fat". She concluded: "The _____ of viruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is [an important] question that demands _____ research."

stages

factors

ethically

additional

theory

idea

role

lack

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Obesity could be catching

A new report into obesity _____ that being overweight could be catching. Scientists have discovered an obesity virus that might be as easy to _____ as a cold. American researchers say that washing your hands could be one way to kill the virus and _____ becoming overweight. _____ hygiene could improve the lives of millions of people around the world. Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin did research on a human virus that _____ obesity in chickens. She believes it could also make humans fat. She also believes the virus _____ in most countries around the world.

Scientists have discussed the _____ that a virus could lead to obesity for many years. Dr. Whigham is positive that other _____ make people overweight, not just a poor diet or lack of exercise. She said testing is still in the early _____ and more research is needed to _____ her theory. However, research into the virus causing obesity is difficult. Dr. Whigham said: "You cannot _____ do experiments...that infect humans and see if they get fat". She concluded: "The _____ of viruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is [an important] question that _____ additional research."

AFTER READING / LISTENING

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

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| • catching | • idea |
| • cold | • poor |
| • avoid | • early |
| • improve | • difficult |
| • chickens | • ethically |
| • exists | • research |

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 from a virus?
- c. Do you think it's possible that things like depression or absent-mindedness could also come from 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 stay at 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 its possible for obesity to be contagious?
- d. How often do you wash your hands?
- e. Do you think obesity is a forgotten about epidemic?
- f. Do you think increasing obesity could 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 experience. 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 teased		
"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 solutions 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 every day. Write about whether you need to eat and drink these things. Write also about whether or not you can live without these different foods and drinks. Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

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

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. report	study
b. catching	contagious
c. avoid	keep away from
d. basic	simple
e. caused	led to
f. idea	notion
g. factors	things
h. early	initial
i. ethically	morally
j. additional	extra

PHRASE MATCH:

a. being overweight	could be catching
b. be as easy to	catch as a cold
c. washing your hands could be	one way to kill the virus
d. improve the lives of millions	of people around the world
e. a human virus	that caused obesity in chickens
f. positive that other factors	make people overweight
g. testing is still	in the early stages
h. research into the virus	causing obesity is difficult
i. You cannot ethically do	experiments that infect humans
j. an important question	that demands additional research

GAP FILL:

Obesity could be catching

A new **report** into obesity shows that being overweight could be catching. Scientists have discovered an obesity virus that might be as easy to **catch** as a cold. American researchers say that washing your hands could be one **way** to kill the virus and **avoid** becoming overweight. Basic **hygiene** could improve the lives of millions of people around the world. Dr. Leah Whigham of the University of Wisconsin did **research** on a human virus that caused obesity in chickens. She believes it could also **make** humans fat. She also believes the virus **exists** in most countries around the world.

Scientists have discussed the **idea** that a virus could lead to obesity for many years. Dr. Whigham is positive that other **factors** make people overweight, not just a poor diet or **lack** of exercise. She said testing is still in the early **stages** and more research is needed to prove her **theory**. However, research into the virus causing obesity is difficult. Dr. Whigham said: "You cannot **ethically** do experiments...that infect humans and see if they get fat". She concluded: "The **role** of viruses in the worldwide epidemic of obesity is [an important] question that demands **additional** research."