

# Local expert weighs in on obesity 'epidemic'

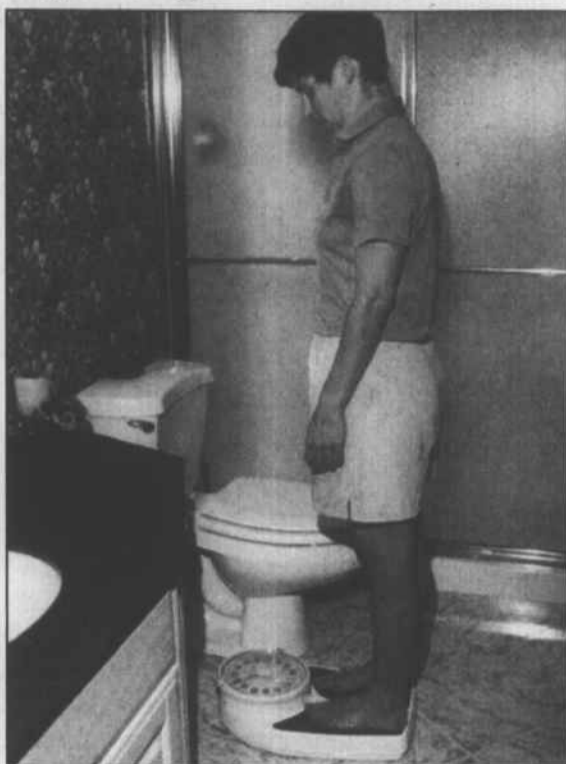
BY PAUL COLLINS  
THE CHRONICLE

The escalating obesity epidemic is a serious health problem for not only the United States but many other countries, said Paul M. Ribisl, Ph.D., chair of the health and exercise science department at Wake Forest University. "It's becoming a global epidemic," he said.

And obesity is more prevalent in African-Americans and Hispanics than whites, he said.

Obesity often leads to Type II diabetes, which used to be called adult-onset diabetes because, years ago, it generally did not begin until adulthood, often when people were about 50 years old. But now, because of increasing levels of obesity and decreasing levels of physical activity in the population, Type II diabetes is occurring in people at younger ages, including teenagers and people in their 20s and 30s.

Ribisl said Type II diabetes can lead to a host of health problems, including cardiovascular disease, which occurs throughout the body, not just in the arteries and heart, which can cause a



inactive too, according to Ribisl.

Here are some things Ribisl thinks should be done to help address the obesity epidemic: 1. Parents, schools and the medical community need to admit there is a problem with child obesity and work with children who have weight problems. 2. Schools should teach proper nutrition and offer a balance between physical

education, intramurals and athletics. 3. Parents should start teaching their children at a young age about the importance of nutrition and physical exercise, and parents should be good examples themselves. 4. Fast-food restaurants should be required to label fast foods to tell such things as calories, saturated fat content and sugar content.



Ribisl

heart attack, but also damage to the retina, which can cause blindness, and damage to the microvascular system in the feet and

legs, which can result in lack of circulation, gangrene and eventually amputation. It also could damage the kidneys.

Ribisl, who has studied obesity and its consequences on health for more than 25 years, said that one factor that contributes to a greater prevalence of obesity among African-Americans than whites is that African-Americans tend to have a different perception of what is overweight or obese. African-American women tend to view a greater body weight/fuller figure as being acceptable, and African-American men tend to accept women with fuller figures more than white men do, Ribisl said.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is another factor that is very important, he said. Studies have shown that people with lower socioeconomic status (education and income) do not have the education or money to eat as well as those with higher SES. Regardless of ethnicity, people who have limited education and income tend not to be as knowledgeable about good nutrition, and they have less money to eat well, Ribisl said. "It costs more money to eat well — more fruits and vegetables and higher quality protein," he said.

African-Americans and Hispanics generally have lower socioeconomic status levels than whites, Ribisl said.

He said he believes another factor in the obesity epidemic is the fast-food industry. It's often possible to feed your family cheaper on fast food than by buying high quality food and preparing it yourself, he said.

The fast-food industry makes it easier for individuals to have access to low-cost, easily-accessible, high calorie foods, he said. And in households where both parents work and there isn't a stay-at-home parent to prepare nutritious foods, the quick and easy alternative is to go for fast food, Ribisl said.

He said another factor in the U.S. obesity epidemic is that many school districts allow the sale of soft drinks.

And what about the issue of kids spending a lot of time watching television, playing video games or using computers instead of being physically active?

"That itself is not dangerous," Ribisl said. "What is dangerous is if they are eating and snacking while they are watching TV. The calories they consume are rarely healthful. They are usually high calorie." If young people were physically active an hour a day, they could probably watch television or use a computer without a problem if they don't snack on high-calorie foods while they are doing it, he said.

A problem is that many school districts have reduced physical education in schools and are not offering adequate intramural programs, so many kids, especially those who don't play on inter-scholastic sports teams, do not do much physical activity in school, and then they go home and are

## WSSU trustee will deliver Founders Day Address

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Dr. Clifford A. Jones Sr., senior pastor at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte and Winston-Salem State University trustee, will deliver the keynote address for the university's 111th Founders Day Convocation at 9:45 a.m. Oct. 31 on campus at Kenneth R. Williams Auditorium.

In addition, the WSSU School of Health Sciences' Division of Nursing will present its Spirit Award to Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue for her outstanding leader-

ship in health and wellness issues.

Jones, who is celebrating his 20th year as pastor at Friendship, has been a member of the university's board of trustees since 1995. The leader of the 6,000-member congregation is a graduate of Southeastern Theological Seminary, where he received a master of divinity degree. He is a graduate of the Boston School of Theology, where he earned a doctor of ministry degree. He lives in Charlotte with his wife, Carolyn, and his two children.

His address will be part of a daylong sequence of activities in

conjunction with the university's homecoming schedule of events. The convocation pays honor to the founders of the university for their leadership and guidance in charting a course for the university's future.

The day will begin with a wreath-placing ceremony in the courtyard of Williams Auditorium at 8:45 a.m. All degreed faculty and staff have been invited to participate in the academic procession. The processional line will form at 9:15 a.m. in the lobby of Hall-Patterson Building.



Photo by Courtney Gaillard

Dozens of people were on hand for last week's groundbreaking.

### Veterans

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that this is what the vets are here to do," said Barrie Buy, who is also member of the American Legion.

Councilman Fred Terry, who represents the Southeast Ward, said the eatery is needed in the

area and will complement any functions at the neighboring football stadium. Only one sit-down restaurant sits on Martin Luther King Drive between Fifth and Sprague streets.

"If you look at the Southeast Ward, there is not an entire sit-down restaurant in the entire ward, so this is a good addi-

tion," Terry said.

Mayor Allen Joines appreciates the economic investment that the vets restaurant will bring to this portion of the city.

"We're delighted to have this in this area, which is starting to turn around, and this will help push it on over the top," Joines said.

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