

## Brisk Walking: The Underused Modality to Alleviate Obesity

Chee Keong Chen\*

Senior Lecturer, Sports Science Unit, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

The worldwide prevalence of obesity has doubled since 1980. In 2008, 35% of adults older than 20 years of age were overweight [1]. Obesity has serious implications because it is associated with a two-fold risk in heart disease and diabetes and also increased incidence of some cancers, upper respiratory problems, arthritis, and other health problems. As a developing nation, Malaysia is not exempted from this obesity phenomenon. The first national estimates of overweight and obese adults were reported from the second National Health and Morbidity Survey in 1996 (NHMS 2) as 20.7% and 5.8%, respectively [2]. A decade later, the prevalence of overweight and obesity among the Malaysian adults rose to 29.1% and 14.0% respectively as reported in the 2006 NHMS [3].

Prevalence of obesity and its adverse consequences across different age groups were also reported by various investigators in Malaysia [4-12]. The high prevalence of overweight and obesity in Malaysia was associated with diabetes and adverse lipid and glucose metabolism [4,10]. It has been reported that there was a high prevalence of overweight and obesity in a selected public university and this was attributed to psychosocial factors and working hours [8]. It was also interesting to note that the prevalence of overweight and obesity among the medical students of a Malaysian private university was high [12].

In the past decade, various steps have been taken to diminish this scourge of obesity in Malaysia. Among the measures taken was the '10,000 steps a day' campaign in 2009 by the Malaysian Ministry of Health. 'My Health' programme was also launched by the Malaysian Health Promotion Board in an effort to increase optimal nutrition via promoting healthy food choices and weight reduction. The Malaysian Ministry of Education also initiated the '1S 1S' (One student, One Sports) programme with the objective of getting more school children becoming more physically active. All these programmes have good intentions and they are supposed to reduce the prevalence of obesity in Malaysia. However, the Malaysian Minister of Health, Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai has voiced out his concern that Malaysia was the fattest nation among the South East Asian countries in 2013 [13]. Thus, it is clear that the previous efforts or strategies planned to overcome the obesity problem among the Malaysian adults have not been too successful.

Likewise, there has been a growing trend of obesity among the Malaysian children and one of the contributing factors is that they do not have enough physical activity in their daily lives and in the school setting. Children have been deprived of regular physical activity in their daily lives and Wafa et al. (2011) reported that there were some beneficial effects of lifestyle intervention among the obese children in Malaysia [11]. Physical activity during physical education classes was also non-existent or at its minimum level in many schools as physical education is a non-prioritised subject in school and not adequately supervised and monitored [14,15]. Besides that, there have been recommendations by various investigators in Malaysia that level of physical activity among its adult and younger population should be increased as a measure to curb the obesity epidemic [5-7,10-12,16]. Thus, there is strong evidence that there is a lack of regular physical activity among the Malaysian population. In my opinion, brisk walking is an underestimated and underused modality to counteract the onslaught of the obesity in Malaysia and may be other parts of the world. Nevertheless, brisk walking as a means to overcome obesity is not something new. It has

been proposed as a modality for the overweight and obese individuals by previous researchers [17-21].

Benefits of brisk walking include positive changes to body composition, body weight, lipid metabolism and insulin sensitivity [17-21]. Other benefits of brisk walking include reducing stress and depression levels, enhancing bone health, and increasing longevity. Walking is an ideal way for the overweight and obese individuals to begin an exercise programme since it can be performed with minimal instruction or equipment and is low in cost. Moreover, there is no requirement for a pedometer to count your steps. Hence, brisk walking is an appropriate modality for obese people of all ages except for the overly obese (BMI > 40.0) and individuals with chronic knee pain.

Since previous measures to curb the rise of obesity in Malaysia have not been too successful, the promotion of brisk walking in Malaysia ought to be given due consideration. Aggressive public health campaigns from both the government and non-government organisations will be much needed to make brisk walking a life-changing habit among the overweight and obese population in Malaysia. It has never been easy to persuade sedentary individuals to embark on something out of their comfort zone, i.e. performing physical activity on a regular basis. However, I do believe that with concerted effort from the government, non-government agencies and particularly, the affected individual themselves, brisk walking (30 minutes per day, 3 times a week), may lead to a drastic decline in the statistics of overweight and obese Malaysians in the not too distant future.

### References

1. World Health Organization (2014) Obesity: Situation and trends.
2. Lim TO, Ding LM, Zaki M, Suleiman AB, Fatimah S, et al. (2000) Distribution of body weight, height and body mass index in a national sample of Malaysian adults. *Med J Malaysia* 55: 108-128.
3. Omar MZS, Daud NA, Nudin SSH (2006) The Third National Health and Morbidity Survey: Physical Activity. Ministry of Health.
4. Mohamad WB, Mokhtar N, Mafauzy M, Mustafa BE, Musalmah M (1996) Prevalence of obesity and overweight in northeastern peninsular Malaysia and their relationship with cardiovascular risk factors. *Southeast Asian J Trop Med Public Health* 27: 339-342.
5. Ismail MN, Chee SS, Nawawi H, Yusoff K, Lim TO, et al. (2002) Obesity in Malaysia. *Obes Rev* 3: 203-208.
6. Rampal L, Rampal S, Khor GL, Zain AM, Ooyub SB, et al. (2007) A national study on the prevalence of obesity among 16,127 Malaysians. *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr* 16: 561-566.
7. Kee CC Jr, Jamaiyah H, Noor Safiza MN, Khor GL, Suzana S, et al. (2008) Abdominal Obesity in Malaysian Adults: National Health and Morbidity Survey III (NHMS III, 2006). *Malays J Nutr* 14: 125-135.

\*Corresponding author: Chee Keong Chen, Senior Lecturer, Sports Science Unit, School of Medical Sciences Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia, Tel: +609 767 6933; E-mail: [ckchen@kck.usm.my](mailto:ckchen@kck.usm.my)

Received March 11, 2014; Accepted March 14, 2014; Published March 18, 2014

Citation: Chen CK (2014) Brisk Walking: The Underused Modality to Alleviate Obesity. *J Obes Weight Loss Ther* 4: e112. doi:10.4172/2165-7904.1000e112

Copyright: © 2014 Chen CK. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

8. Cheong SM, Kandiah M, Chinna K, Chan YM, Saad HA (2010) Prevalence of obesity and factors associated with it in a worksite setting in Malaysia. *J Community Health* 35: 698-705.
9. Khambalia AZ, Seen LS (2010) Trends in overweight and obese adults in Malaysia (1996-2009): a systematic review. *Obes Rev* 11: 403-412.
10. Mohamud WN, Musa KI, Khir AS, Ismail AA, Ismail IS, et al. (2011) Prevalence of overweight and obesity among adult Malaysians: an update. *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr* 20: 35-41.
11. Wafa SW, Talib RA, Hamzaid NH, McColl JH, Rajikan R, et al. (2011) Randomized controlled trial of a good practice approach to treatment of childhood obesity in Malaysia: Malaysian Childhood Obesity Treatment Trial (MASCOT). *Int J Pediatr Obes* 6: e62-69.
12. Gopalakrishnan S, Ganeshkumar P, Prakash MV, Christopher, Amalraj V (2012) Prevalence of overweight/obesity among the medical students, Malaysia. *Med J Malaysia* 67: 442-444.
13. Cheng N (2013) Malaysia is now the fattest country in SE Asia, says Liow.
14. Aboshkair KA, Amri SB, Yee KL, Sama BBA (2012) Assessment of implementation level of physical education in Selangor secondary schools, Malaysia. *Wulfenia Journal* 19: 108-124.
15. Wee EH (2013) Contemporary Issues in the Teaching of PE in Malaysia. *Journal of Physical Activity Sports and Exercise* 1: 17-20.
16. Sidik SM, Ahmad R (2004) Childhood obesity: contributing factors, consequences and intervention. *Malays J Nutr* 10: 13-22.
17. Morabia A, Costanza MC (2004) Does walking 15 minutes per day keep the obesity epidemic away? Simulation of the efficacy of a population wide campaign. *Am J Public Health* 94: 437-440.
18. Leon AS, Conrad J, Hunninghake DB, Serfass R (1979) Effects of a vigorous walking program on body composition, and carbohydrate and lipid metabolism of obese young men. *Am J Clin Nutr* 32: 1776-1787.
19. Ford P, Swaine I (2012) Continuous versus accumulated brisk walking in children aged 8-11 years. *Eur J Sport Sci* 12: 89- 95
20. Gwinup G (1975) Effect of exercise alone on the weight of obese women. *Arch Intern Med* 135: 676-680.
21. Hills AP, Byrne NM, Wearing S, Armstrong T (2006) Validation of the intensity of walking for pleasure in obese adults. *Prev Med* 42: 47-50.