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Medicine : Public Health

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Weight of Modernity

An Intergenerational Study of the Rise of Obesity

- Provides people's experiences of changing environments and the emergence of social trends
- Yields a comprehensive description of the social environment as it is embodied and multiply determined
- Creates new frameworks of understanding that can help shift obesity trends from their current lethal trajectory

Over a half of adults in the US, Canada, Australia and numerous European countries are now overweight or obese, a proportion that has risen sharply in the past two decades. Dominant biomedical explanations focus on the energy equation – an imbalance between energy intake and expenditure – and remedies focus on motivating individuals to restore the balance by eating better and being more active, or – in extreme cases – surgical intervention. This book offers a perspective that sees increasing obesity as a social phenomenon as well as a public health problem. It contains detailed accounts of three generations of Australians' experiences of changing environments and the emergence of social trends such as increasing availability of convenience foods, the individualisation and commercialisation of leisure, car reliance, and busyness. Participants' narratives are interwoven with sociological and historical analyses of changes to show how contemporary Australians are experiencing and adapting to dramatic socio-cultural and environmental changes that are reshaping their lives and, in many cases, their bodies. The book demonstrates that obesity is an unintended consequence of economic development accompanied by profound socio-cultural changes, and by identifying the key developments the authors propose leverage points. While the research was conducted in Australia, the fundamental drivers of rapid weight gain are equally present in other modern, secular societies.

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