

**The Struggles of Childhood Obesity**

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**Grade 7**

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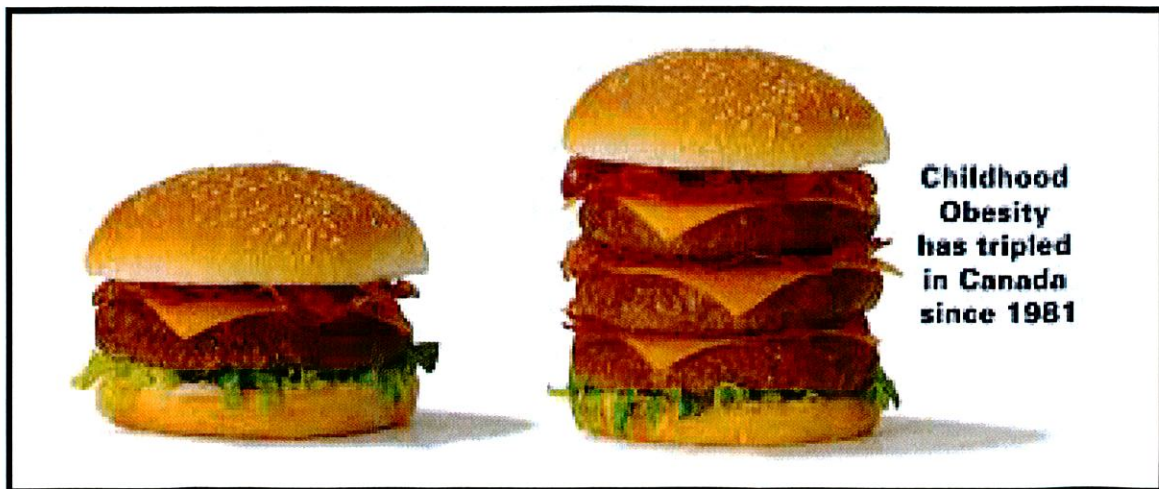
## **Introduction**

Did you know that more than 400,000 people die each year because of obesity? Obesity is the condition of being very fat or overweight. It has been a rising problem in the United States but unfortunately over the past thirty years Canada's obesity rates have been increasing as well. In particular, child obesity has tripled over the past twenty-five years. Today's teenagers are the leaders and shapers of the twenty first century. Therefore this alarming increase in child obesity rates will have a severe impact on Canada's economic future. As it stands right now, Ontario alone spends 4.5 billion dollars each year on childhood obesity and related health issues. I think that this is an unnecessary cost that could be reduced if Canadian parents were able to establish healthy eating habits for their children and promote an active lifestyle. There are many factors effecting child obesity and in my opinion, these factors need to be addressed and dealt with before it gets any worse. The Canadian government needs to spend money to prevent child obesity rather than treat it.

On average, teens fifteen to seventeen years old weigh twelve pounds more than teens their age thirty years ago. This change can be directly related to the increase in technology over the same time period. This new advancement has given food industries the knowledge to genetically alter

food produce and increase additives to make food last longer at the expense of our health. In the job industry, due to technological advancements, parents are working on computers more, therefore creating an inactive lifestyle for them and their children. Technology advancement is only one of many factors increasing childhood obesity rates. Other societal factors contributing to this rate include: unhealthy eating, lack of physical activity, a fast paced lifestyle, cost, economic status, accessibility and marketing. There are also personal causes that effect this increase such as low self- esteem and genetics.

Through a series of journal entries you will be introduced to a thirteen year old, fictional, Canadian girl named Miranda who is struggling with obesity. You will see how these factors have contributed to her lifestyle and how she is affected by the challenges related to obesity.



## *Miranda's Battle With Obesity*

### Meet Miranda:

Miranda is a thirteen year old girl that lives in Norfolk county, near Tillsonburg Ontario. She weighs 259 pounds and has struggled to control her weight for many years. Both Miranda's parents are overweight and her two younger, twin brothers are beginning to struggle with their weight gain as well.

*Did you know. . . that obesity is a function of genes and environment. Genes are inherited from the parents and play a huge part in controlling hunger?*

Her mom works shifts at a local Tim Hortons restaurant and her dad commutes one hour and forty minutes per day to a recycling plant. Even with two incomes Miranda's family is considered to have a low economic status. She is in grade eight at a local public school where she achieves average to above average grades. Due to her parents work schedule, Miranda is required to take care of her brothers before and after school. As a result, she has little time to socialize and does not have many friends.

October 9, 2013

Dear Diary,

I had a final math test in algebra today and I think I did pretty well. I hope I aced it! I really wish that I had more time to study last night but I was busy watching my little brothers. I always have to do that after school! Mom was working the late shift so I know I will have to get my brothers breakfast in the morning.

We also got a new student in our class today, her name is Angela. She seems really nice except I saw her and a group of other girls pointing at me and whispering. I know they think I am fat! I hate it when people judge me for what is on the outside before they know who I am on the inside. The teasing has been going on since kindergarten. No one wants to be seen with the fat kid! I don't feel like I fit in anywhere. I wish I could lose weight but whenever I try, I feel like I am fighting a battle that cannot be won.

Whenever we go grocery shopping, mom won't buy the food I want. She says fresh produce spoils too fast and is too expensive. She will only buy the cheaper, pre-packaged foods that I can make easily. Usually, if I don't make dinner, mom or dad will bring home McDonald's or something.

*Did you know. . . that about one quarter of Canadians eat fast food every day?*

I always watch soccer games on T.V. and dream that one day I can be on a team, racing down the field and score the winning goal. The crowd would cheer as I am lifted to the sky by my team, waving the trophy above my head. I would love to be able to play soccer, but when I asked mom, she said that we couldn't afford it and they don't have time to take me. I guess it's fine though, I would just embarrass myself anyway.

I really wish I could find some way to lose weight.

Miranda





November 22, 2013

Dear Diary,

A couple weeks ago, I was looking on the internet for a way to lose weight and I found a diet where you can only drink lemon water. I tried it out, but I only lost a couple pounds, nothing noticeable. Ever since I started, I have been really tired and distracted. I went home sick from school yesterday because I felt dizzy and couldn't concentrate. After that, I gave up on the diet. It seems hopeless!

*Did you know. . . that 1 in 3 dieters are on an unhealthy weight loss process?*

I was happy that dad got to come home from work early today so I didn't have to make supper. Since it's a Friday night he rented a movie and we ordered pizza. I told him that pizza is unhealthy and that we could go to the grocery store to buy vegetables to make a salad instead. Unfortunately, he said that the grocery store is too far away and he's too tired to go anywhere or to prepare a healthy meal.

*Did you know. . . that the amount of Canadians that prepare healthy meals declined from 70 percent in 2001 to 65 percent in 2008?*

I thought about going for a walk to get exercise but I stayed home terrified of what people might think when they see me. I am scared they will tease me for the way that I walk. I am scared that everyone at school will find out that I am trying to lose weight. The last thing I need is for Angela to find out. She's always calling me names and saying bad things about me. My life would be over if she found out!

*Did you know. . . that approximately 160,000 children stay home from school a day because they are afraid of being bullied?*

How am I going to do this? It feels impossible!

Miranda

December 15, 2013

Dear Diary,

Hurray, I finally beat the high score on my video game! I was so excited that I finally beat the game, until we had a school presentation for Turn off the Screens Week. The presentation stressed the importance of getting exercise instead of being occupied by screens. It made me realize maybe I could lose weight if I reduced my screen time and substituted it with physical activity.

*Did you know. . . that 8.6 hours of children's possible exercise time is spent on screens because of advanced technology?*

The only time I use the computer is when I email my pen pal from Korea. She always sends me lots of pictures of herself and her family. She is so pretty and skinny. I wonder how she stays that thin? I'm scared to send her any pictures of me. What if she doesn't like me anymore after she sees what I look like? What if she teases me about how much I weigh? Would she stop writing me if she knew my condition? This issue has caused me a lot of problems, but I don't want it to destroy my only friendship!

Miranda

January 3, 2014

Dear Diary,

I don't understand! I have been trying the best I can to get exercise, to eat as healthy as possible with my limited nutritious food supply and to stay off electronics, but I still feel overweight. Everywhere I go and everywhere I look, people are staring and laughing. They're all tall, skinny and beautiful! Why do I have to struggle with my weight when everyone else has no problem controlling theirs? I wish I could just be a normal teenager. I dream about one day, being a beautiful, popular girl, that plays sports, goes shopping and has lots of friends.

The media has created an "ideal image" that they advertise in magazines, on billboards and in commercials. They follow me wherever I go, so I always feel self-conscious about my weight and it never goes away! It's not possible for me to ever look like a model in a magazine so why am I trying?

*Did you know. . . that girls stigma with being overweight is driven by fashion ideals?*

Angela is still saying mean things to me and excluding me from her groups at school. I asked if I could be in her group for gym class but she

just laughed and walked away. All over my desk and notebooks she has written names and made comments like "What happened to you? Did you eat a bus or something?" or " Why are you here? Go back to giant land." Why does she hate me? I never did anything to her? I want to tell the teacher what she's been doing but what if he laughs at me too? What would Angela do to me if I got her in trouble? Sometimes, I just want to curl up on the couch and cry!

Miranda

February 19, 2014

Dear Diary,

Things just keep getting worse and worse! My parents seem to be working 24/7, so I am always babysitting my brothers and never get any time to myself. I haven't had much time to exercise between balancing homework, chores, and putting up with Angela's put downs. Now she's even posting hurtful comments about me on Facebook! Also, mom hasn't had time to grocery shop because of her work schedule lately, so I have been living on a steady diet of fast food hamburgers, fries and soft drinks. As far as losing weight, I am not doing so well.

*Did you know. . . that 300 extra calories from pop cause weight gain? Also did you know that 35% of the sugar Canadians consume comes from added sugar in soft drinks opposed to natural sugar in fruit and milk?*

I got back my final math test in algebra last week. I didn't do as well as I thought I did, but the mark wasn't horrible. Sadly, that wasn't the only time my marks have slipped recently. I care about school and I am generally a good student, so I don't know why my grades have suddenly dropped. I just have so much on my mind and it is hard to think straight. My teacher was concerned so he recommended a parent teacher interview

to discuss this sudden change.

I feel awful! My spare time consists of sitting on the couch watching T.V. and eating potato chips.

*Did you know. . . that people turn to food for emotional comfort? We often enjoy high-calorie "comfort foods" when we are stressed.*

How much more messed up can my life get?

Miranda

March 28, 2014

Dear Diary,

My parents are getting a divorce. Dad packed his bags and left us. I have spent every night since, crying myself to sleep. It was so sudden and unexpected, I didn't know what to do. I missed a whole week of school, processing the news. The day before dad left, I fainted and was taken to the hospital. They discovered that I have type two diabetes.

*Did you know. . . that obesity can cause various diseases such as insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, obstructive sleep apnea, and lower quality of life? It can also causes many eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia.*

I feel worthless like I am just a waste of space. Maybe Angela was right I don't deserve to be here. I don't even care what I look like anymore. I am going to be judged and made fun of no matter where I am for numerous reasons now, so what's the point?

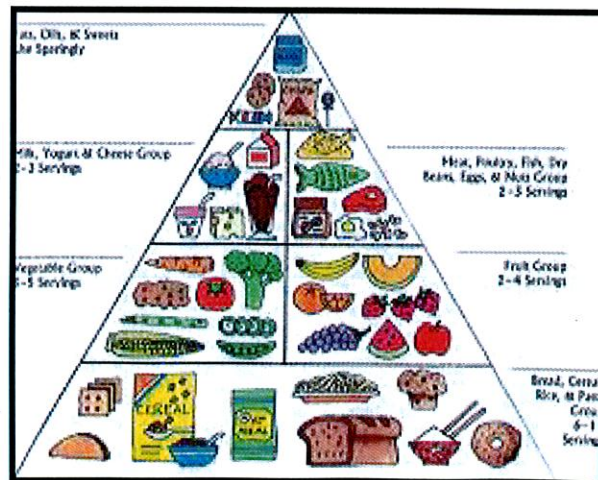
Miranda



## **What Parents Can Do**

Miranda's situation is not uncommon across Canada. Many adolescents struggle to overcome the many factors that contribute to obesity as cited throughout Miranda's journal entries. Research shows that the current generation might be the first to have a lower quality of life than their parents, due to weight issues. I feel that parents need to be responsible for teaching their children the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Children learn what they live, so parents should set a good example by eating nutritious foods and being involved in physical activity with their children. Parents should be thoroughly informed of Canada's Food Guide and follow its suggestions and guidelines. Also, they need to be able to understand nutrition labelling and know how many calories their children should have per day. Studies indicate that sitting down for at least one family meal daily decreases risk of unhealthy weight gain. Children are generally happier, healthier, and perform better in school when regularly enjoying family meals. The more parents prepare and eat with their children the more their children learn about cooking and nutrition. In order to prevent obesity, parents not only need to encourage a vigorous diet, they also need to support daily physical activity. If it is too expensive for parents to register their children to participate in organized sports they can still encourage

exercise by promoting walking, biking, running, skateboarding and playing outside rather than permitting their children to spend extended periods of time watching television and playing video games. Another way for parents to support physical activity is by allowing their kids to use active transportation to get to and from school. Finally, in situations where divorce is inevitable, parents should ensure that the divorce process is as simple as possible so that they limit the effects on their children. Furthermore, parents need to use their time and money effectively for the well-being of their children.



# What Families Eat Around the World in One Week

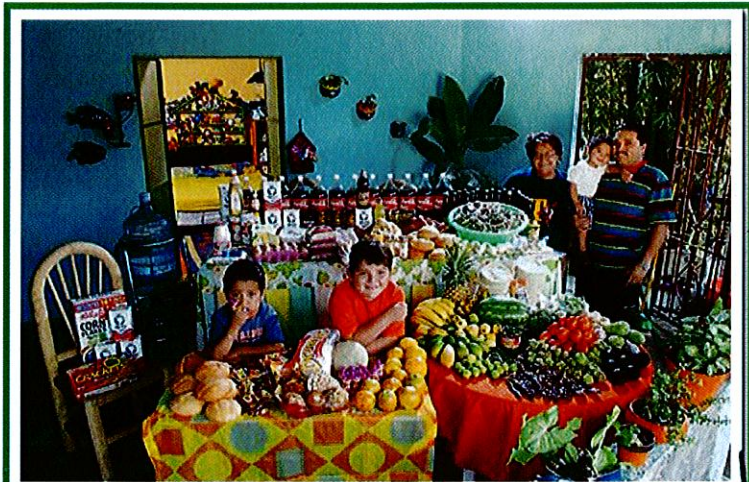
Photography By: Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio



United States  
(North Carolina)



Canada  
(Nunavut)



Mexico  
(Cuernavaca)

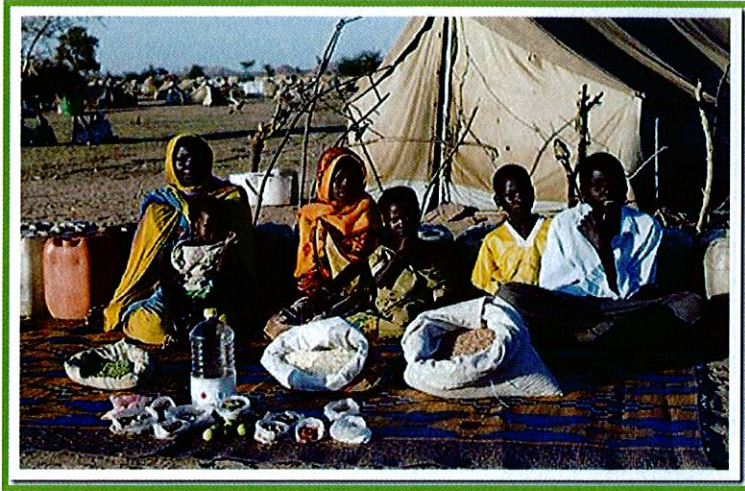
United Kingdom  
(Cllingbourne Ducis)



Germany  
(Bargteheide)



France  
(Montreuil)



Africa  
(Chad)

Australia  
(Riverview)



China  
(Beijing)

Japan  
(Kodaria)

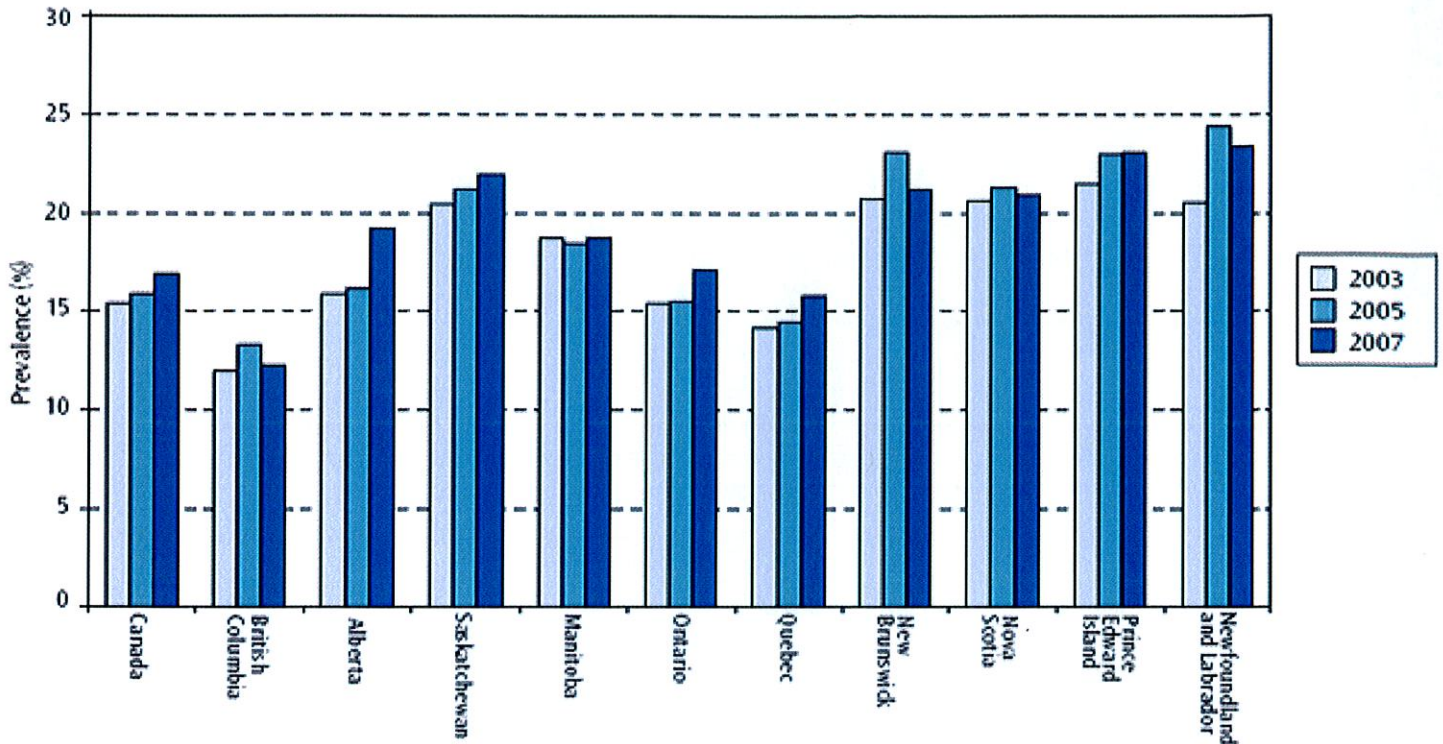


Name of Country	Common Household Foods	Obesity Rate (Age 15 and up)
United States (North Carolina)	-Spaghetti -Potatoes -Chicken with sesame seeds	35.9
Canada (Nunavut)	-Narwhal (fish) -Pizza -Polar Bear -Watermelon	24.2
Mexico (Cuernavaca)	-Pizza -Crab -Pasta -Chicken	30.0
United Kingdom (Cllingbourne Ducis)	-Avocado -Mayonnaise Sandwich -Chocolate fudge cake with cream	26.1
Germany (Bargteheide)	-Fried potatoes with onions -Fried noodles -Bacon and herring -Pizza -Vanilla pudding	14.7
France (Montreuil)	-Apricot tarts -Pasta carbonara -Thai food	12.9
Africa (Chad)	-Soup with fresh sheep meat	18.1
Australia (Riverview)	-Yoghurt -Eggs -Beef -Pie	21.7
China (Beijing)	-Fried shredded pork with sweet and sour sauce	2.9
Japan (Kodaria)	-Sashimi -Potato chips -Fruit -Cake	3.5

## Global Obesity Rates and Nutrition Chart

From this chart I conclude, that countries with high obesity rates seem to eat a lot of fried, processed and high-calorie foods such as pizza. Also as the pictures before show, many of these countries consume lots of pop and fruit drinks.

## Canada's Obesity Percentages



The graph above shows the obesity percentages for Canada's provinces and territories in the years 2003, 2005, and 2007. From this graph, I can see that the province or territory with the highest obesity percentage in 2003 was Prince Edward Island. Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest obesity percentage in 2005 and in 2007. I can also see that the province or territory with the lowest obesity percentage in all three years was British Columbia. I think that they have the lowest rate because they have lots of mountains and forests therefore providing ample opportunities to get exercise through hiking, running, walking, biking, skiing and kayaking.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, every child has hopes and dreams that can easily be shattered by low self-esteem and a poor body image. I feel that everyone should have a fair chance at a healthy and happy life without having to worry about always reading nutrition labels to avoid the additives in the high-calorie, processed foods that the government is allowing to be sold to us. I think it is an absurd concept to always be self-conscious about your body image and weight. Just like in my family, there are many Canadian families with extended members that have to deal with this issue on a daily basis. With Canada's rising obesity rate, it makes me concerned about my future children and the nutritional dilemmas they will have to face. In addition, the Canadian government is actually causing a health care crisis by processing our natural food sources to make them last longer. These foods have a high impact on obesity, so whatever money the government is making through the sale of this food, I feel they will be spending more in health care due to obesity related diseases. In my opinion, the government should be spending more money to further educate young parents about the importance of a balanced lifestyle, to fund more organized sports, and to provide access to fresh produce in every community. Presently, only seven percent of Canada's youth are meeting the requirements of the Canadian

Physical Activity Guidelines. With government and society working together to reduce our obesity rate, Canada could become a healthier, better functioning nation with a lower death rate.



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