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Obese but Hungry

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America today is full of paradoxes. We are one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but our health care is the most expensive and children are going to bed hungry. Starved, gaunt bodies of the Depression Era have been replaced with obese physiques due to people not exercising nearly enough or not eating the right foods. Media simultaneously alarms us about an obesity epidemic while proclaiming more and more people struggle with hunger.

Feeding America reports:

- 1 in 7 Americans struggles with hunger
- Food insecurity affects almost every U.S. community

According to the American Heart Association, in America:

- 2 in 3 adults are overweight, and 1 in 3 are obese
- Between 1962 to 2006, adult obesity increased from 13.4 to 35.1 percent.
- Compared to the 1950s, the average adult today weighs over 26 pounds more.

How can this be?

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The [Food Research and Action Center](#) refers to a Frongillo & Bernal study, which concluded that the “coexistence of food insecurity and obesity is expected given that both are consequences of economic and social disadvantage”.

In the New York Times article, [“The Obesity-Hunger Paradox”](#), Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, Joel Berg explains, “Hunger and obesity are often flip sides to the same malnutrition coin... hunger is certainly almost an exclusive symptom of poverty. And extra obesity is one of the symptoms of poverty.”

The combination of hunger and obesity are not counterintuitive because lower-income people often lack access to healthy, affordable foods. Impoverished neighborhoods do not have as many healthy options as more affluent ones do. Therefore, lower-income people gravitate towards what’s available: cheaper, fattening and filling alternatives that are often highly processed, artificially colored and unnaturally preserved.

Historically, [food banks](#) had fought hunger with whatever donors would give them — often not nutritious food. Luckily, that’s changed. For example, the [Houston Food Bank](#) offers seasonal fruits and vegetables to help address the growing number of clients who have diabetes due to poor diets. In 2014, Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks, served 15.5 million households— one third of those households had a diabetic member.

It’s not enough that we focus on hunger; we must approach it in a holistic way that promotes overall health. A working group of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (part of the World Health Organization) just compiled solid evidence that [obesity is linked to at least 13 types of cancer](#). Hunger and obesity are not isolated issues— we are dealing with very serious health problems that are interconnected.

This September, we encourage you to make a difference during Feeding America’s Hunger Action Month. Help raise awareness about hunger in our communities, volunteer your time or drop off nutritious food at your local food bank ([click here to find one near you](#)), or [donate to the food bank in your community](#). Let’s solve hunger, healthfully, together.

Co-authored with Shane Power, President of [Watertree Health](#), where both help drive the cause-marketing [program benefitting local food banks](#).