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Clinton: U.S. risks 'collapse' without obesity solution

- Story Highlights
- Experts gather at CNN's first Fit Nation Summit to propose obesity solutions
- Former President Clinton: Without obesity solution, nation risks "collapse"
- Motivating youngsters, removing shame, embarrassment called key
- Experts: Removing trans fats, finding healthy replacements also critical

By Val Willingham
CNN

NEW YORK (CNN) -- Obesity is the No. 1 health crisis in the United States, and the nation could be at risk without immediate action, former President Clinton said at CNN's first Fit Nation Summit.

"We need to do something about it for our children, and for our country, because something like this could easily collapse our nation if we don't act now," Clinton said.

Clinton and CNN's chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, gathered with experts from across the country in November to explore solutions to America's obesity crisis.

Two-thirds of adult Americans are overweight or obese; the same is true for one-third of U.S. children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Obesity](#) carries increased risk of myriad health problems, including hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and arthritis.

Gupta, Clinton and a panel of experts addressed such proposed solutions as healthy school lunches, elimination of trans fats, the need for healthier food in urban communities and the importance of supporting community-based efforts to fight obesity.

[Watch Gupta explain the solutions proposed at the Fit Nation Summit »](#)

Clinton, who's been tackling the obesity issue over the past few years with his Alliance for a Healthier Generation, stressed the need to help educate people about the importance of a healthy [diet](#) and exercising together.

Motivating Americans, especially kids, won't be easy, Clinton said. "They need to be handled with care. Kids need to know it's important, but [fitness] can't be boring," he said. "There's no shame, there's no embarrassment. We have to let them know it's all good, but you have to do it."

Michael Jacobson, director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and a strong advocate against trans fats in foods, stressed that the Food and Drug Administration should ban trans fats altogether and stop leaving it up to local and state governments.

Trans fats, at one time, thought to be good fat substitutes, over the years have been shown to raise LDL or bad cholesterol in people and lower their HDL, or good cholesterol. "They're just not good for our health, Jacobson said.

However, Dr. Robert Eckel, former president of the American Heart Association, warned, "Although we support the removal of trans fats, our biggest concern is what they'll be replaced with. We need to think about that, because there will be a substitute."

The panel took questions from an audience of 150 people -- mostly obesity experts or those who work in industries that deal with obesity.

Gupta was inspired to launch Fit Nation, an ongoing, multiplatform, grass-roots initiative against obesity. Over the past three years, Gupta and the CNN Medical Unit have crisscrossed the country, asking Americans to take charge of their weight by exercising more and eating healthier.

This year, Gupta traveled from Michigan to California asking the public to pledge to add 1 million hours to their collective lives by getting off

the couch and exercising. Since he began the tour in April, the campaign has surpassed its goal, with exercise pledges close to four times that amount.

Gupta said he hopes that legislators and administrators who can make a difference in policy and perhaps change attitudes about obesity will hear the solutions discussed at the summit.

"I've covered a lot of stories on obesity," Gupta said. "There's a battle going on, and we need to win the battle. I've talked to people out there and many are just blasé.

"This is our opportunity to make them care."

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