

# Men's Health News

OBESITY

## Is Obesity the Government's Business?

By Sara Cann February 11, 2012, 11:00 am EST

Sorry, Uncle Sam, but you've been benched in the fight against obesity. That's according to the Intelligence Squared debate earlier this week, where more voters were swayed to believe that weight control is a personal decision—leaving little room for government intervention.

But with obesity affecting one-third of Americans, this problem is too big for the private sector to tackle, argued debaters former Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., and Pamela Peeke, M.D., MPH, WebMD's chief lifestyle expert.



### **Obesity Is the Government's Business, Doctors Argue**

Supporting the motion, "Obesity is the Government's Business," this duo of doctors made the case that without the government's help, people wouldn't be able to receive the resources and education needed to beat obesity and its associated risks of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

### **More from MensHealth.com: Is Gluten Making You Fat?**

"Government is the collective efforts of a society to create the conditions in which people can be healthy. So that's what we see as government. We believe that there is no substitute for individual responsibility. Let's make that clear. It's why I wrote the *Prescription to the American People*. But individual responsibility can only take place in an environment where there is equal opportunity, there is equal access to the opportunity for a healthy lifestyle," said Dr. Satcher.

### **Personal Responsibility Is the Key, Others Say**

Cue the contrarians. And the folks at Intelligence Squared know how to stimulate a

lively debate: Invite a Libertarian. Fox News Anchor John Stossel took any chance to prove that government hasn't had a strong track record intervening in the personal lives of Americans. And his debate partner, Paul Campos—author of *The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to Your Health*—disputed the scientific evidence on obesity and its associated health risk—basically begging the question whether obesity really needs to be stigmatized and whether it is a life-threatening disease.

“We do know that labeling bodies as diseased is stigmatizing, and we know that stigma is very bad for health,” says Campos. “I would advocate more than anything else that we ought to focus on harm reduction, not weight reduction. And if you say that you don't want to stigmatize obese people but you just want to stigmatize obesity, I would suggest that that is a protocol that's not going to be successful.”

### **What Swayed the Voters?**

The debate evolved into a fistfight over wording. Campos accused his opponents of trying to make “fat people thin” while Dr. Peeke and Dr. Satcher emphasized that they're just trying to enforce a healthy lifestyle—not necessarily weight loss. Perhaps because of this muddled back-and-forth banter, voters were swayed to change their original votes. Or maybe it was Campos' conspiracy-esque theory, which he brought up in his closing statement:

“What's happening is that all this talk about lifestyle intervention is something that the pharmaceutical industry loves because they know that that stuff doesn't work. And the point of all this discourse is to soften up the regulatory pipeline for the next generation of diet drugs. That's where the real money is, and that's why we're hearing about obesity, obesity, obesity all the time.”

### **Your Health: It's in Your Hands**

Truth? Well, hopefully not, or we'd be out of a job. We still have slews of emails from readers talking about how much weight they lost with conventional methods like diet and exercise. And just check out our story [20 Reasons to Lose 20 Pounds](#) for compelling evidence to lose weight if you're overweight.

Before the debate, 55 percent of the audience believed the government should be involved in battling bulge while 19 percent were against and 26 were undecided. After the debate, the team against the motion swayed 16 percent of the vote while those in favor of government regulation remained unchanged.

Regardless of these results—and which side of the debate you would vote for—you ultimately have to take charge of your health. We're here to help. To start you off, here are [10 Easy Ways to Lose Weight](#).