Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. The forces at work to expand our waistlines include the marketing efforts of grocery chains and their placement of high-calorie products in store aisles, our friends' junk-food preferences, and nutritional messages from our parents.

RAND Health leads comprehensive research efforts to better understand all sides of this epidemic:

- Demographic trends
- Societal influences
- Promising solutions

PORTION SIZES ARE TOO BIG.

Portions of à la carte items offered on kids' menus averaged 147% more calories than portions recommended by health experts. Hundreds of menu items are more than 600 calories each—the maximum number of calories recommended for an entire children's meal.

Supermarkets have room to improve.

37% of the food first seen when entering supermarkets is considered unhealthy (e.g., empty calories). Unhealthy food is placed in prominent positions.

It's no surprise that children follow their parents' lead ...

... and teens follow their friends' lead.

Children of parents who drink more sugary drinks consumed nearly 2x more sugary drinks than kids of parents who consumed few or had negative attitudes to sugar-sweetened beverages. In the two public schools studied, teen junk-food intake was predicted by their friends' intake.

But there's hope.

State and school policies have had some positive effects.

The odds of school children being obese were reduced by 22%–48% in states that had strong policies regulating foods and beverages available outside of the federal school meal programs (e.g., foods sold at fundraisers).

www.rand.org/health