
As More Latin Americans Eat Processed Food, Obesity Rates Surge

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Nearly 60 percent of Latin Americans are overweight, according to a UN report. Latin America, once plagued by malnutrition, now faces a different type of public health crisis as processed food increasingly replaces traditionally prepared dishes, leading to a surge in obesity rates, a United Nations report showed on Thursday.

Nearly 58 percent of the region's inhabitants, or close to 360 million people, is either overweight or obese, said the report by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The rapid jump in obesity rates has crisscrossed the region, affecting Latin Americans "regardless of their economic situation, place of residence or ethnic origin," it said.

That has occurred partly as economic growth, increased urbanization, higher average incomes and the region's integration into international markets have reduced the consumption of traditionally prepared food and raised that of ultra-processed products, the report said.

The problem is greatest in countries that are net food importers.

The countries with the highest levels of obesity are the Bahamas, Mexico and Chile, with rates of 69 percent, 64 percent and 63 percent, respectively.

Still, even as obesity rates surge, Latin America is still home to the nation with the highest rate of undernourishment; in Haiti, 53 percent of the population is undernourished.
