Study shows unhealthy eating linked to 400,000 U.S. deaths annually

New York, August 16 (RHC)-- Unhealthy eating habits can be blamed for more than 400,000 U.S. deaths a year due to heart disease and related illnesses, researchers have announced. And they say that numerous studies have found that a healthy diet was not only a matter of choice but also income and education. Experts agree that people in the U.S. are eating too much salty, fatty and sugary fare, and not enough fruit, vegetables and whole grains.

"Low intake of healthy foods such as nuts, vegetables, whole grains and fruits combined with higher intake of unhealthy dietary components, such as salt and trans fat, is a major contributor to deaths from cardiovascular disease in the United States," said lead study author Ashkan Afshin, assistant professor of global health at the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

Trans fat has been largely phased out of the food supply, but can still be found in some margarines, biscuits, cookies, frosting and other processed foods. The study was based on data from a variety of sources going back to the 1990s, including the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

By examining data on U.S. cardiovascular deaths in 2015, researchers found that dietary habits played a role in the deaths of an estimated 222,100 men and 193,400 women.

If people were to alter their eating habits, many lives could be saved, Afshin said, yet overlooking numerous studies that have found that a healthy diet was not only a matter of choice but also income and education. "Our results show that nearly half of cardiovascular disease deaths in the United States can be prevented by improving diet."

Obesity reaches higher rates in correlation with poverty, which is associated with lower availability of healthy foods and fewer safe neighborhoods where people can walk and children can play for exercise. For instance, more than 75 percent of African-Americans are overweight or obese, compared with 67.2 percent of whites.

That pattern affects children, too. In 2012, just over 8 percent of African-American children ages 2 to 19 were severely obese, with a BMI above 40, compared with 3.9 percent of white children. About 38 percent of African-American children live below the poverty line, while 12 percent of white children do.

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