

This week I want to write about one major difference that I have noticed the United States and Japan. I have only been here for about 6 weeks now, and I feel like I am only starting to notice some of the many differences between my life here and at home. The most obvious difference for me is that natural disasters seem to be never-ending in Japan! Last week Mr. Taniguchi said, "Welcome to the country of natural disasters," and I guess he was right. I never had to worry about earthquakes or even typhoons when I lived in Cleveland or Washington DC, so this is something very new to me. A more important difference between the two countries that I am going to write about today is the different way that people eat and the stereotype of fat Americans.

It's true that many people in the United States are overweight. However, when I was living there, I never recognized it. Only when I returned from traveling in Japan, or returned from my year studying in France did I really notice that there are many overweight Americans. Even though there are so many obese people, they are sometimes treated very poorly in the United States, and they are often discriminated against because of their size. In Japan, even people that are fat by Japanese standards would not be considered fat in the United States. When I look around in Japan, I never notice any fat people.

There was an interesting movie that came out in the United States this year called "Super Size Me." This is a documentary film about a man who eats only McDonald's, every meal of the day for a month. It shows how quickly he becomes fat and sick, but it also examines the bigger problem of obesity in America. I think it is a very interesting movie, because it shows how fast food companies appeal to children and make them loyal customers while they are young. This way, when the children grow up, they are used to eating fast food and continue to eat there regularly. Most people should realize that it is not healthy to eat here often, but sometimes they don't. It is very important that Americans, as well as people all around the world, think seriously about these choices that have such a large influence on their health.

I was brought up in a family where candy and sweets were only a special treat, and not something that we were allowed to eat every day or even every week. My parents emphasized the importance of fruits and vegetables and eating healthy foods to stay fit. I also regularly played sports while I was growing up so I have always known what I should do to stay healthy. Even so, I have lost weight since I came to Japan. I eat the same amount of food that I used to, but I eat Japanese style food and lots of rice. This makes me think that it is not only the amount of food that we Americans eat, but also the type of food that makes people fat.

Many years ago, women didn't work, but rather stayed at home and cooked

dinner for their families. After the feminist movement, many women have rejected this role and have their own jobs as well. Because both men and women work now, many families don't like spending the time to cook meals at home and eat out in restaurants often. They will also eat prepared foods and TV dinners that have many additives and little nutritional value. I think this makes it difficult to feel satisfied even after eating a lot of food. If more Americans took the time to cook fresh foods at home, I think there would be less of an obesity problem. Also, the unhealthiest foods in America are usually the least expensive. For poor parents who are struggling to feed all of their children, it is sometimes less expensive to go to McDonald's and buy big portions of unhealthy food than to go to the grocery store and buy something healthy to make at home. For this reason, obesity in the United States is not limited to the richest part of society. Richer Americans are often healthier because they can afford to eat healthy, join a gym and find the time to exercise. People with less money are often forced to work all the time and eat unhealthy foods on the go.

Now everyone in the United States is talking about the obesity problem and how we can change our society and make people healthier. Many people are on diets and trying the latest fad to lose weight. In some cases, people will have surgery to staple their stomach in order to eat less. Doctors can actually reduce the size of someone's stomach so they are physically not able to eat more than a very small amount of food. Most of these people are used to eating not because they are hungry, but because they want to eat. Even if their stomachs are smaller, they will still want to eat a lot of food. If someone really wants to lose weight, I think they should have the will power to start eating healthy and exercise, without having surgery on their stomach. Obesity is a difficult problem for Americans, and I think it is starting to become more visible in other places around the world too. Many people are looking for a quick fix, or an easy way to lose weight fast. When these diets don't work, many people just go back to their old unhealthy ways of eating. I think that fat Americans need to realize that they should change their way of thinking and try to adopt a healthy lifestyle instead of simply trying to get thin fast.

This is a very complicated problem because it is something that has been growing gradually for a long time. I don't think there is one easy way to solve this problem because it we must encourage people to change their habits to be more healthy and this is difficult to do. It seems to me that obesity is not a big problem in Japan, maybe because many Japanese people seem more conscious of living a healthy lifestyle. Do you agree? I have only been here for a few weeks so maybe there is more about this issue in Japan that I don't yet understand. I'm interested to know what you think!