

Can the world cope with the weight of all the fatties?

Rising obesity levels are causing problems all over the world but, as DICK LUMSDEN discovers, at least it is keeping the scientists in work

There isn't a day goes by without some scientist somewhere coming out with a new or rehashed revelation about what is good for us, what is bad for us – or what is going to kill us off eventually.

I imagine the chief executives of all the major health charities cringing every time some new theories are expounded – there goes millions of their fundraising pounds in research donations, telling us the blooming obvious.

This month the hot topic is fat (again). It seems I can't open a newspaper or go online without reading about good fat, bad fat, brown fat or white fat.

And speaking as someone with a BMI on the wrong side of "healthy" but the right side of "obese", I just can't help myself feeling a sense of guilt.

According to the World Health Organisation, a staggering 1.6 billion people worldwide are now classed as obese – that means they have a BMI of more than 30.

I have a BMI of 28, which makes me overweight but not obese, but I know I could do with losing at least a stone if not more. So that got me thinking about some fat facts of my own.

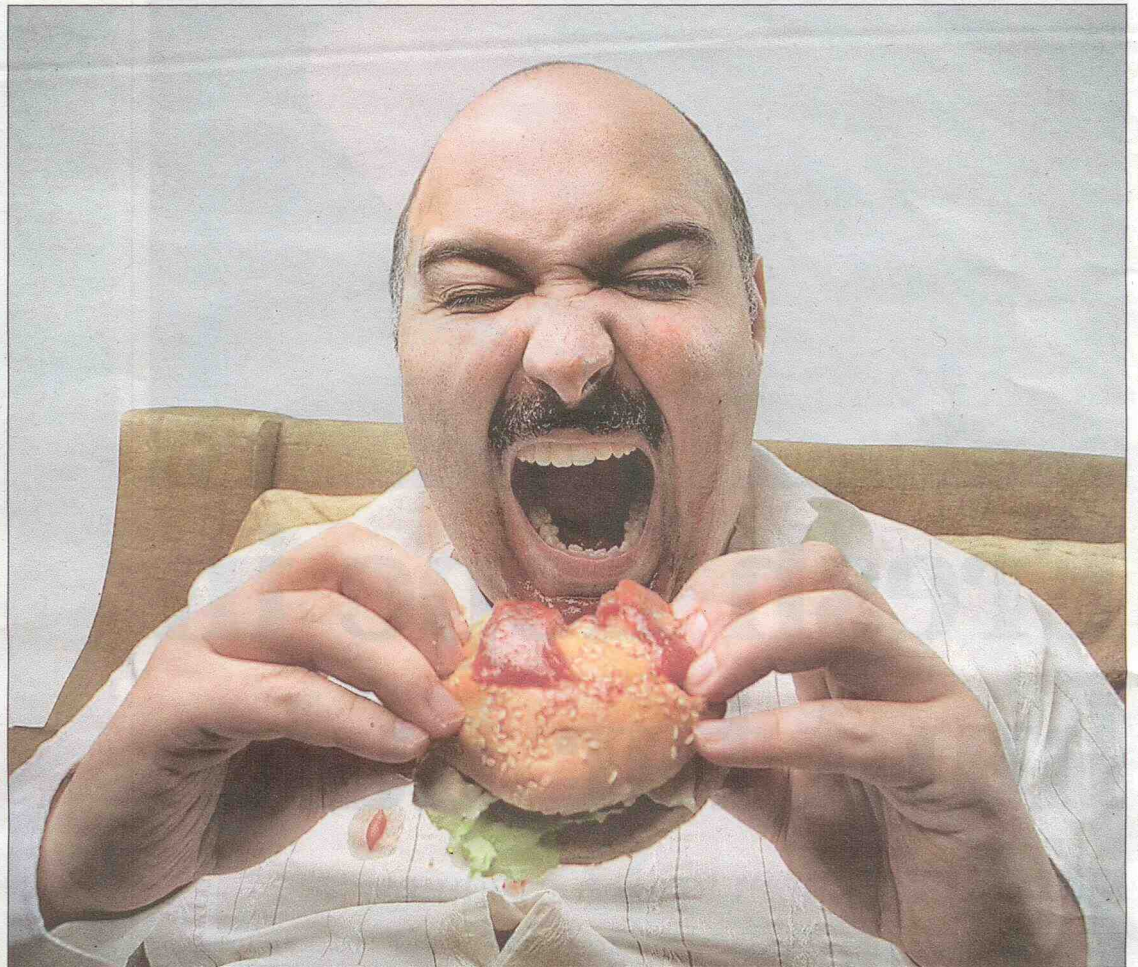
If we said, being conservative, that anyone obese is at least two stones overweight (and many are considerably more than that) then that means all of the world's fatties are collectively carrying around 3.2 billion extra stones – or 44.8 billion pounds.

Now, imagine the dimensions of your average pack of lard – about four inches long and half a pound in weight. It means that all of that unwanted human blubber is equivalent to a ring of lard going right round the Equator to a depth of almost 40 feet – no wonder our climate is changing.

Every time all of these fat people move around they collectively shift 20 million tons of grease, causing the whole planet to wobble.

A study this month by the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden (great name) seems to point to a link between being overweight in middle age, and the risk of developing dementia in later life.

They studied hundreds of people over the age of 65, and checked back on their medical records. Of those who were overweight in their 50s (people like me) it seems they had an 80 per cent higher risk of developing dementia than those of a healthy



WEIGHTY ISSUE: there are billions of pounds of unnecessary fat wobbling around the planet

Photo: GETTY IMAGES/HERERA

The Swedish boffins have not, as yet, discovered why this should be, but think it may be something to do with the fact that fatty tissue produces lots of hormones which may affect the brain. More research needed, clearly.

A separate study I read this month – from the American Academy of Neurology – claims something very similar, but is more precise in pinning the blame on belly fat. Forget bums, thighs and bingo wings, they say the risk of memory loss is higher in later life with those who carry around a big belly in their middle age.

Try as I might, I can't shift my spare tyre, so I've decided to minimise the risk of losing my glasses, or mislaying the car keys, or forgetting my son's name as I get older.

I am going to start now, by labelling cupboards and drawers, pinning up names under photographs and colour coding

medical journal, also reported this month that British women are now the fattest in Western Europe – only slightly sweetening the pill by saying they are not as fat as American women.

Before I attract a storm of protest here though, I must say that studies like this are based on averages, and there are many, many slim and attractive women in Britain who are not at all fat!

Until I started digging into fat this month (metaphorically, not literally), I was totally unaware of the difference between "good" brown fat and "bad" white fat.

It seems that brown fat is like a portable energy store, burnt off by our bodies when we need more fuel, but white fat just sits around our bellies doing no good at all. Scientists (yet more of them) at John Hopkins University School of Medicine in America claimed this month to have found a way of turning white fat into brown fat

able to take a pill and galvanise my spare tyre. Back to the drawing board chaps.

Perhaps the final – and most commercial – word should go to the Harley Street clinic, which this month claimed that increasing numbers of women are paying £1,200 a time for liposuction to get rid of fat – but are also signing up to have the fat stored in a tissue bank at a cost of £200 a year so that they can have it injected back in 20 years or so when they are a lot older and everything starts to sag... that is assuming they haven't lost their memory and can still remember where it is stored of course.

It's a funny old world.

Dick Lumsden is managing director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views on this article, or are