# EAST LONDON SCHOOL DAY OF DEBATE

# "THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT FAT PEOPLE BE ALLOWED OPERATIONS"

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## Should fat people be allowed operations?

One of the biggest debates in our society refers to the relationship between the individual and the government. For some people, the government should let people get on with their lives as long as they don't harm anyone else in the process. So, for example, if I want to eat too much or drink so much alcohol that it makes me sick, but no one is damaged on the way, then I should be free to do so. Others think that this idea is dangerous, as it can easily be taken too far. By eating or drinking too much, they argue, I could damage myself and other people around me. So they say that it is the duty of the government to prevent people from doing certain things in excess by making rules and creating taxes to stop such behaviour. Both sides of the argument have strong points: while adults should be free to choose what and how much they want to eat or drink, their poor eating and drinking habits can have undesired consequences that can affect the lives of other people in society.

## Obesity and the NHS

Obesity is what doctors call it when you have too much body fat. If more than 25 per cent of a man's total weight is fat, he is classified as being obese. A woman is obese if she has more than 32 per cent body fat.  The main causes of obesity are: an unhealthy diet (eating fattening foods, or eating too much) and an inactive lifestyle (not getting enough exercise). There are many health problems which can result from obesity: heart disease, diabetes and damage to weight-bearing joints (knees, for example) are just some of them.

Because obesity has these undesirable health effects, some people think it should not be seen as just a personal problem. In Britain, we have a health service, the NHS, is funded primarily by taxation. That means that most of the UK's population contribute financially, so all legal citizens of the UK can have access to free or low-cost healthcare. But if some people make a lot of demands on doctors and hospitals because they make bad choices about their diet, should we really expect everyone else to pay more?

## A matter of lifestyle?

How does this relate to the issue of obesity? If we consider the costs to treat obesity-related issues, we can have a clearer idea.  A government report recently claimed that obesity costs the NHS £6.4 billion per year. Costly obesity-related treatments and operations are not only funded by overweight people, but by everyone who pays taxes. Most people are not obese, and many live what doctors would describe as 'healthy lifestyles'. Many members of society believe that this is not fair. Why should society pay for the treatment of someone who indulges in an unhealthy lifestyle (someone who eats too many burgers, smokes, drinks too much, does not exercise enough, etc)?

The issue, however, may not be as straightforward as it sounds. As we all know, it is very hard to follow a healthy lifestyle. A lot of tasty foods are bad for you, and not many of us are crazy about broccoli or Brussels sprouts. So, let us imagine that, you do not eat your five-a-day fruit and veg, or do not go out often enough to exercise. According to many doctors and politicians, this means that you live an 'unhealthy lifestyle'.

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Now, would it be fair for the NHS to deny you an operation if you needed one, on the grounds that you are not doing enough to be healthy? It would be very tricky to leave these very personal decisions - what and how much you eat, how often you exercise etc - inform the kind of healthcare you have the right to receive. Would it be fair to restrict this to those who follow a certain kind of lifestyle?

Other people argue that it living an unhealthy lifestyle might save the government money. If you have bad habits and die young, then there will be fewer years when you need to see a doctor, get paid a pension or receive care because you are too old and frail to look after yourself. If that is the case, that means that restricting access to healthcare on the grounds that it is too expensive to treat fat people might seem unfair. Others would say that if you pay your taxes like everyone else, you should get the same rights to treatment, no matter what you do.

So who is right? Should we stop fat people having operations until they lose weight? Would that actually help them, by giving them a good reason to eat healthily? Or is the claim that fat people cost the government a lot of money just a way for the government to interfere in our personal choices?