

# “The Growth of Obesity and Technological Change: A Theoretical and Empirical Examination”



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Policy Studies, Department of Economics,  
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President's Room – 3rd Floor, Coffman Memorial Union  
300 Washington Avenue S.E.  
University of Minnesota East Bank

A theoretical and empirical examination of the long-run growth in weight over time shows that weight gain results from more sedentary lifestyles and lower food prices through agricultural innovation. Such technological changes lead to unexpected relationships among income, food prices, and weight. Using individual-level data from 1976 to 1994, technology-based reductions in food prices and job-related exercise have significant impacts on weight across time and populations. About forty percent of the recent growth in weight seems to be due to lower food prices, while sixty percent is due to demand factors such as declining physical activity.

**Background:** Professor Tomas Philipson is a faculty member in the Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies, Department of Economics, and Law School at the University of Chicago. He is currently on leave from to The Commissioners Office of The Food and Drug Administration. He received his undergraduate degree in mathematics from Uppsala University and Ph.D. in economics from the University of Pennsylvania. He was a visiting faculty member at Yale (1994-95) and visiting fellow at The World Bank (Winter 2003). Philipson's research and teaching focuses on health economics. His research has been widely published in leading academic journals (e.g. *The American Economic Review*, *The Journal of Political Economy*, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Journal of Economic Theory*, and *Econometrica*) and covered by numerous media outlets (e.g. CNN, FOX News, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *Investor's Business Daily*, and *The Chicago Tribune*).

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