



Rx: Health Care FYI #19

Subject: *Reducing American Obesity*
From: *Rep. Tim Murphy (PA-18)*

The problem: Poor nutrition habits and a lack of physical activity have fueled a dramatic increase in spending to treat medical problems associated with obesity.

Increasing problem: Rates of obesity have been climbing:

Adults:

- Obesity rates have doubled for U.S. adults over the past 20 years from 30 to 60 percent of the population.¹
- Between 280,000 to 325,000 adults in the U.S. die each year from obesity related medical problems.²
- Obesity reduces the life expectancy of young males by approximately 20 percent.³

Children:

- The proportion of children and adolescents who are overweight has tripled in the past 3 decades.⁴
- Obesity in children and adolescents increases the incidence for many medical complications typically found in adults, such as hypertension, diabetes, cholesterol and heart disease.⁵

Obesity increases medical problems:

- Obesity raises the risk for over 20 medical conditions including type 2 diabetes, arthritis, heart disease and a variety of cancers by increasing fat deposits, weakening immune systems and reducing mobility.⁵
- For example:
 - Heart Disease: High blood pressure is twice as common in adults who are obese than in those who are at a healthy weight.
 - Diabetes: A weight gain of 11 to 18 pounds increases a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes to twice that of individuals who have not gained weight.
 - Cancer: Women gaining more than 20 pounds from age 18 to midlife double their risk of postmenopausal breast cancer, compared to women whose weight remains stable.
 - Arthritis: For every 2-pound increase in weight, the risk of developing arthritis is increased by 9 to 13 percent.
 - Obesity During Pregnancy: Increased mortality risk in both the baby and the mother. Increases the risk of maternal high blood pressure by 10 times.⁶

¹ Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Ogden CL, Johnson CL. Prevalence and trends in obesity among US adults, 1999-2000. *JAMA* 2002; 288(14): 1723-1727.

² *Prevention Report*. USDHHS. 2001; Volume 16:Issue 1.

³ Fontaine, Kevin. Years of Life Lost Due to Obesity. *JAMA*. 2003;289:187-193.

⁴ Yanovski, Jack. Treatment of Pediatric and Adolescent Obesity *JAMA*, Apr. 2003.

⁵ Prevention Makes Common Cents. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2003.

Americans are not eating properly or exercising:

- Eating large amounts of junk foods high in sugar, calories, and/or fat without an increase in physical activity leads to obesity.
- Less than a third of U.S. adults engage in regular non-employment related physical activity.⁷
- 43 percent of obese people who had routine checkups were encouraged by their physicians to lose weight, however, less than 20 percent are following their doctors' recommendations to increase physical activity and reduce calorie intake.⁸

Obesity costs money:

- \$75 billion is spent annually for obesity-attributable medical expenditures. Approximately one-half of these expenditures are financed by Medicare and Medicaid. Obesity-attributable expenses cost Medicare from \$15 million in Wyoming to \$1.7 billion in California, with Medicaid costs from \$23 million in Wyoming to \$3.5 billion in New York.⁹
- Spending on health care among obese adults averaged \$1,244 higher per person (about 56 percent more) than for healthy-weight adults. This raised private health spending by employers and private health insurers to nearly 12 percent or more than \$36 billion.¹⁰
- Obesity-associated annual hospital costs for children and youth more than tripled over two decades, rising from \$35 million in 1979 to \$127 million in 2000.¹¹

The federal government's role:

- The federal government has released new Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 available at: <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/>.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Initiative *Healthier US* provides \$125 million in grant funds to reduce the burden of obesity. Information is available at: <http://www.healthierus.gov/index.html>.

Recommendations:

- Prevention starts at home. Exercise personal responsibility, eat balanced diets and healthy meals and establish an exercise routine and healthy nutrition program for you and your family.
- Work with communities to support education partnerships and networks to expand access to healthful foods and physical activity programs at schools and in the workplace.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current federal obesity reduction programs.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity. 2005.

⁷ Barnes PM, Schoenborn CA. Physical activity among adults: United States, 2000. Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics; no. 333. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2003.

⁸ Mokdad AH, Bowman, BA, Ford ES, Vinicor F, Marks JS, Koplan JP. The continuing epidemics of obesity and diabetes in the United States. *JAMA* 2001; 286(10): 1195-1200.

⁹ Finkelstein, Eric. Et al. State-Level Estimates of Annual Medical Expenditures Attributable to Obesity. Centers for Disease Control. Obesity Research. 12:18-24 (2004)

¹⁰ Thorpe, Kenneth. Et. al. The Rising Prevalence Of Treated Disease: Effects On Private Health Insurance Spending. Health Affairs. June 2005.

¹¹ Institute of Medicine. Focus on Childhood Obesity Fact Sheet. 2005.