



Presented by Mercola.com

Call Toll Free: 877-985-2695

# Obesity Surpasses Smoking in Terms of Ill Health Effects

August 03 2012 | 6,746 views | [+ Add to Favorites](#)

54 10 31 4 27 [Print](#)

[Like](#) [Tweet](#) [Email](#)

## By Dr. Mercola

This may come as a surprise to some, but data collected from over 60,000 Canadians show that obesity leads to more doctor visits than smoking.

The idea that being overweight can be worse for your health than smoking is likely to make many balk, considering how "normal" it has become to carry around extra pounds, but in terms of overall health effects and subsequent health care costs, it's likely true.

The study estimates that if obesity were not a factor, doctor visits in Canada would decrease by 10 percent. The decrease would be even greater if you take into account problems related to type 2 diabetes, which is also directly related to obesity and poor diet.

With the obesity epidemic putting pressure on health care systems everywhere, this news may trigger financial penalties or incentives to get people to lose weight, according to Medical News Today [1].

*"Just as smokers have higher life insurance premiums, people who are obese could also be made to pay more for health insurance. The complication is that obesity tends to be more prevalent among people with low income, making this solution difficult to implement,"* Medical News Today said.

*... "The fact that obesity is more serious than smoking helps people understand the gravity of the problem because they already have some kind of intuitive understanding of how bad smoking is,"* says [lead researcher, James] McIntosh.

## Excess Weight is a Gateway to Chronic Disease

Canadian and American obesity statistics are neck-to-neck, with about one-quarter to one third of adults in the obese category. A staggering two-thirds of Americans are overweight. This does indeed place a heavy burden on the health care system. It's important to realize that a large number of diseases are directly attributable to obesity, including:

Diabetes	Polycystic ovarian syndrome	Urinary incontinence	Pickwickian syndrome
Cancer	Gastro-esophageal reflux disease	Chronic renal failure	Depression
Congestive heart failure	Fatty liver disease	Lymph edema	Osteoarthritis
Enlarged heart	Hernia	Cellulitis	Gout
Pulmonary embolism	Erectile dysfunction	Stroke	Gallbladder disease

## Most Adults and Teens Not Exercising and at High Risk of Disease

Physical activity and good health go hand-in-hand. The problem is most adults and teens aren't physically active enough to stay healthy and maintain ideal weight. According to a series in the journal Lancet on physical activity and health, not exercising is leaving around a

third of adults (1.5 billion people) and 4 out of 5 adolescents at a 20-30 percent greater risk of diabetes, heart disease, and some types of cancer.

Reported by Medical News Today [2]:

*"Investigations revealed that the recommended activities, known as moderate-intensity activities, like walking for 30 minutes at least 5 times a week, or running for 20 minutes 3 times a week, is not being done by approximately 3 out of 10 adults worldwide."*

Worse yet, an estimated 80 percent of 13 to 15 year olds are not getting the recommended one hour per day of physical activity! According to one of the Lancet reports [3], lack of exercise causes as many as 1 in 10 premature deaths around the world each year — roughly as many as smoking...

### Too Much TV Linked with Thicker, Weaker Kids

There can be little doubt that our modern lifestyle is at the heart of the problem. We eat poorly and don't exercise enough. The results of this sedentary, under-nourished lifestyle are evident in today's children. Today, one-third of all American children ages 2-19 are overweight or obese. Most of these children will become diabetic.

Spending hours in front of the TV or playing video games is of course a hallmark of a sedentary lifestyle.

If you needed any more proof that too much time in front of the TV is not good for kids, then you'll be interested in a new study that not only affirms that TV-time is linked to sleep problems and weight problems, but also to weaker muscles [4]. The new study, published in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity [5], shows that the number of hours in front of the TV during preschool years is linked to increased waist size and decreased leg strength.

According to the authors:

*"Watching television excessively in early childhood may eventually compromise muscular fitness and waist circumference in children as they approach pubertal age."*

This is significant, the study's authors said, because it not only could affect performance in sports activities, but also cardiovascular health and susceptibility to injuries. TV programming also expose your children to commercials promoting health-harming junk foods; literally programming them from infancy to have a skewed understanding of what to eat. Just as you don't want your child exposed to ads for cigarettes during Saturday morning cartoons, neither should your kids be bombarded by non-stop commercials for sugary foods and snacks.

### Tips for Raising Healthy Weight Children

If you have children who are overweight or obese, I highly suggest you pick up a copy of my book [Generation XL](#), which is packed with tools to transform the health of your children. In the meantime, I would recommend getting started on these crucial lifestyle changes right now:

1. Set strict viewing limits for TV, computer and video games
2. Make exercise a part of your family's daily schedule. Remember, children model your behavior more than anything else
3. Get rid of the junk food and sweetened drinks
4. Set [family meal times](#) and prepare home-cooked meals for your family
5. Reward your children with kind words, not food

### Where Americans Spend Grocery Money, 1982 vs. Today

Overall, about 90 percent of the money Americans spend on food is spent on processed foods [6]. This includes restaurant foods (i.e. food away from home) and processed grocery foods that require little or no preparation time before consuming.

When looking at the ratio of money spent on store-bought groceries only, Americans spend nearly a fourth of their grocery money on processed foods and sweets—twice as much as they did in 1982—according to Department of Labor statistics [7]. Pricing of meats, sugar, and flour has had a great influence our spending habits. These items have actually seen a decrease in price per pound, which has had an inverse effect on Americans' spending habits, in that cheaper prices encourage people to buy more.

The result is obvious. Compared with shoppers 30 years ago, American adults today are twice as likely to be obese, and children and adolescents three times as likely to be overweight. Pediatric type 2 diabetes—which used to be very rare—has markedly increased along with the rise in early childhood obesity. According to previous research, early onset type 2 diabetes appears to be a more aggressive disease from a cardiovascular standpoint [8].

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Credit: Lam Thuy Vo / NPR [9]

## Soda—One of the Greatest Threats to Your and Your Children's Weight and Health

According to the 2010 Report by the Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans [10], the top 10 sources of calories in the American diet are:

1. Grain-based desserts (cakes, cookies, donuts, pies, crisps, cobblers, and granola bars) 139 calories a day	6. Alcoholic beverages
2. Yeast breads, 129 calories a day	7. Pasta and pasta dishes
3. Chicken and chicken-mixed dishes, 121 calories a day	8. Mexican mixed dishes
4. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks, 114 calories a day	9. Beef and beef-mixed dishes
5. Pizza, 98 calories a day	10. Dairy desserts

Between the previous graphic showing where the majority of food dollars are spent, and this listing detailing the top sources of calories in the American diet, it's easy to recognize that the dietary roots of the American weight problem is linked to carbs—sugars (primarily fructose) and grains—in the form of processed foods and sweet drinks. You've often heard me state that soda is the number one source of calories in the US diet, which it was, based on the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). The updated NHANES survey above covers nutritional data from 2005-2006, placing grain-based foods in the top two slots.

Still, soda comes in at number four, and I still believe many people, particularly teenagers, probably still get a majority of their calories from fructose-rich drinks like soda.

Needless to say, obesity and its many related chronic health problems will also take a toll on your lifespan, and soda is a major culprit driving these sad health trends. Term Life Insurance may have an alternative motive for creating and posting an infographic online showing soda's effect on your body [11], but in this case the industry managers are actually trying to help you out while simultaneously adding to their bottom lines.

Image source: [Term Life Insurance](#)

## Basic Tenets of Optimal Health

Leading a common-sense, healthy lifestyle is your best bet to achieve a healthy body and mind. And while conventional medical science may flip-flop back and forth in its recommendations, there are certain basic tenets of optimal health (and healthy weight) that do not change:

1. **Proper Food Choices:** For a comprehensive guide on which foods to eat and which to avoid, see my [nutrition plan](#). Generally speaking, you should be looking to focus your diet on whole, ideally organic, unprocessed foods. For the best nutrition and health benefits, you will want to eat a good portion of your [food raw](#).

Avoid [sugar](#), and fructose in particular. All forms of sugar have toxic effects when consumed in excess, and drive multiple disease processes in your body, not the least of which is insulin resistance, a major cause of chronic disease and accelerated aging.

I believe the two primary keys for successful weight management are severely restricting carbohydrates (sugars, fructose, and grains) in your diet, and increasing healthy fat consumption. This will optimize insulin and leptin levels, which is key for maintaining a healthy weight and optimal health.

2. **Regular exercise:** Even if you're eating the healthiest diet in the world, you still need to exercise to reach the highest levels of health, and you need to be exercising effectively, which means including high-intensity activities into your rotation. High-intensity interval-type training boosts [human growth hormone](#) (HGH) production, which is essential for optimal health, strength and vigor. HGH also helps boost weight loss.

So along with core-strengthening exercises, strength training, and stretching, I highly recommend that twice a week you do [Peak Fitness exercises](#), which raise your heart rate up to your anaerobic threshold for 20 to 30 seconds, followed by a 90-second recovery period.

3. **Stress Reduction:** You cannot be optimally healthy if you avoid addressing the emotional component of your health and longevity, as your emotional state plays a role in nearly every physical disease – from heart disease and depression, to arthritis and cancer.

Meditation, prayer, social support and exercise are all viable options that can help you maintain emotional and mental equilibrium. I also strongly believe in using simple tools such as the [Emotional Freedom Technique \(EFT\)](#) to address deeper, oftentimes

hidden, emotional problems.

4. **Drink plenty of clean water**

5. **Maintain a healthy gut:** About 80 percent of your immune system resides in your gut, and research is stacking up showing that probiotics—beneficial bacteria—affect your health in a myriad of ways; it can even influence your ability to lose weight. A healthy diet is the ideal way to maintain a healthy gut, and regularly consuming traditionally fermented foods is the easiest, most cost effective way to ensure optimal gut flora

6. **Optimize your vitamin D levels:** Research has shown that increasing your vitamin D levels can reduce your risk of death from ALL causes. For practical guidelines on how to use natural sun exposure to optimize your vitamin D benefits, please see my previous article on how to determine if enough UVB is able to penetrate the atmosphere to allow for vitamin D production in your skin

7. **Avoid as many chemicals, toxins, and pollutants as possible:** This includes tossing out your toxic household cleaners, soaps, personal hygiene products, air fresheners, bug sprays, lawn pesticides, and insecticides, just to name a few, and replacing them with non-toxic alternatives.

8. **Get plenty of high quality sleep:** Regularly catching only a few hours of sleep can hinder metabolism and hormone production in a way that is similar to the effects of aging and the early stages of diabetes. Chronic sleep loss may speed the onset or increase the severity of age-related conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and memory loss

[\[+\] Sources and References](#)