Obesity and Health

by Raymond Francis

In September of '97, the self-serving bureaucrats at the Centers for Disease Control announced that there have been "broad gains in the nation's health." They were able to say this with a straight face because there has been a reduction in our excessively high infant mortality, and therefore average life expectancy is up. Unfortunately, the medical establishment is just spreading misconceptions. How can we address our health problems if we think everything is just fine and getting better? Here is the truth: The nation's health is in a long-term decline.

Seventy-five percent of our population now has a diagnosable chronic disease. Sixty-four percent currently take medications, and it's getting worse every year. Yet, get this! According to a recent survey, two-thirds of us think we are in "excellent" or "good" health. Talk about misconceptions! Ninety percent of people over age 65 have a chronic disease, and twenty-five percent of people under age 18 have a chronic disease. Deaths from cancer, asthma, diabetes, obesity, and infectious diseases continue to increase. Cancer has become the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15. Chronic disease is now so widespread and so "normal," it's no wonder sick people think they are healthy. Even if we're living longer, we sure aren't living better.

What can we do to improve our health? For most people the simple answer is lose weight. Look around to see how overweight the American people are. We are the fattest people in the industrial world. And does this matter? Yes, it matters. When a person is overweight their body chemistry is abnormal and abnormal body chemistry is what disease is all about. This is why Dr. Claude Lenfant, director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute says, "Obesity is this country's No. 1 public health problem."

For those who think they are a little overweight but certainly not obese, here's some sobering news. The old definition of obesity, which applies to a third of all Americans, was that you had to be at least 20% over your ideal weight. But new medical evidence, indicating that even a few pounds over ideal weight is unhealthy, applies to almost three quarters of American adults.

From 1988 to 1998, the average American gained 12 pounds. Obesity among adolescents has jumped 40%. Former surgeon general Koop says, "We just can't afford to go on like that . . . If I had stayed on longer, I would have launched the same assault on obesity that I did on smoking."

One of the risk factors of obesity is diabetes. A recent meeting of the International Diabetes Federation concluded that obesity is one of the most preventable risk factors for type 2 diabetes and 80% of diabetics are obese at the time of diagnosis. The Federation also predicted that the way obesity is increasing there will be a global epidemic of diabetes by 2025. Obese people have higher rates all kinds of disease including breast cancer, colorectal cancer, heart disease, osteoarthritis, stroke, cataracts, and gallstones.

Obesity is a very big problem, but it has a very simple solution: reduce caloric intake and get more exercise. Here's some simple things anyone can do. Get some form of regular exercise, even if that's just walking around the neighborhood. Then, cut the sugar out of your life. The average American eats 150 pounds of sugar per year. This translates into 272,000 calories. Someone consuming 35,000 calories per year more than they burn will gain 12 pounds a year. Sugar is an empty calorie, metabolic poison that

robs your body of nutrition, gives you nothing in return, and throws your body into biochemical chaos for six to eight hours after eating it. I used to eat my sugar quota. Now I know better. I eat less than a pound a year and don't miss it at all. Replace those sugar calories with more fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. You'll be surprised at the good results.

Michael Fumento, author of the book, *The Fat of the Land*, argues that we need a national campaign against obesity. When obesity becomes socially unacceptable, the numbers will drop just like the number of smokers. He cautions that obesity won't go away if we all believe there is nothing wrong with being fat.

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