

## Obesity epidemic

*by the San Diego Union-Tribune*

If you think America's rising obesity rate is not a problem, consider that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that medical costs due to preventable obesity-related illnesses total more than \$75 billion a year. About half that figure is picked up by taxpayers.

Among the conditions rightly blamed on being overweight are diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis and gout. Even modest weight loss can significantly reduce the risk for some of these ailments.

Yet, Americans are getting fatter with each passing year.

The latest survey shows that more than 20 percent of the people in 47 states are obese. Mississippi topped the list, with 30.6 percent of adults classified as obese. Colorado had the lowest obesity rate, a "mere" 17.6 percent of adults. However, when all persons who are overweight - not just those who are obese - are counted, even relatively slim Colorado has a deplorable 54.2 percent of people who weigh more than they should for good health.

A raft of excuses is typically offered up to explain why so many Americans are dangerously overweight. They include poverty; increased consumption of high-fat, high-calorie meals from fast-food chains; the automobile society, which deters people from walking; two working parents with little time to prepare healthy meals; school lunches of pizzas, hamburgers and soft drinks instead of salads and milk.

All of these factors contribute, of course, to America's increasing obesity. But none of them changes the reality that, to be healthy, Americans must eat less and exercise more. Do we need to wait for the bad news in the next obesity survey to act on this simple truth?

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