

Combating Obesity

By Kent Pegg

Obesity is a problem facing a growing number of Americans. Today, about one out of every two white adults is overweight and one in five is severely overweight.

And these numbers are even higher for African-Americans and higher still for Hispanic Americans.

Disturbingly, the numbers for children are nearly as high as those for adults.

Clearly, a weight related health problem exists in this country. But, in addition to the health issue, there is an economic impact as well.

Six percent of the nation's health expenditures currently go toward obesity related problems and that number will rise dramatically if obesity becomes covered by insurance, a move expected in the not too distant future.

The direct annual cost of obesity in the United States is over 51 billion dollars and there is another 47 billion dollars spent in indirect cost.

These are staggering numbers that are on the rise and will continue to rise if something is not done.

But what can be done when an unhealthy, sedentary lifestyle seems to be becoming the norm rather than the anomaly?

How do we get the nearly 150 million overweight Americans to address the problem?

The solution must begin on an individual level. While the causes of obesity are numerous and varied, many of us can take steps to control or reduce our weight.

How can a person tell if they are one of the millions of overweight Americans? Bill Hudson, long time Los Alamos fitness guru, suggested in his book, "Words of Wisdom from the Old Coach: Good Stuff on Health and Fitness", that we stand naked in front of a mirror and jump up and down. No doubt, this will give you a good idea whether or not you are overweight!

Other standards exist as well. If a person's Body Mass Index (BMI) is 25-30, they are considered overweight. If their BMI is over 30, they are considered obese.

Similarly, if a person's body fat percentage is over 30-35 percent, they are considered obese.

While a fitness professional can provide you with these measurements and calculations, other measurements can be taken at home.

If a man's waist measures over 40 inches or if a woman's waist is over 35 inches, they are considered overweight and at risk of many physical and health problems.

If you are overweight, the time to start addressing the problem is now. If left unchecked, the problem will only continue to magnify and become even more difficult in the future.

While I understand the difficulties of weight loss for some people, 15, 20 or even 50 pounds can be taken off in a relatively short period of time. However, losing 150 or 200 pounds is going to be a very difficult, long-term issue that will take years.

The sooner you address the issue of weight reduction and control, the better. Start today. If you need help or have other health problems or concerns, seek advice from your doctor or other health/fitness professional.

Once you've been cleared to start, begin by increasing your activity level. Only 22% of Americans are active enough to derive health benefits from their lifestyle, and 25% of Americans are considered completely sedentary.

Increasing your physical activity is the number one way to begin successfully treating obesity.

Burn calories and fat by walking, riding your bike, or working out on cardiovascular equipment at the gym. Aim for burning 200-300 kcal during each session.

But don't forget to strength train as well. Aside from increasing your bone density and making you stronger, this will help you preserve your lean body mass and maintain a healthy metabolism.

And, weight training can enhance your mood and psychological well being while providing a better body appearance.

To make significant change you'll also need to address your diet and your food intake. Start by reducing your calorie intake by about ten percent. Once you've accustomed yourself to this level of intake continue to reduce in ten percent increments until you are taking in approximately 1500 calories per day.

Also, try to reduce the amount of fat and sugar in your diet, and eat lots of fruits and vegetables to ensure you get adequate vitamin and mineral intake.

Finally, eat smaller portions of food more often. You'll be surprised the difference eating five smaller meals per day rather than three large meals will make.

In addition to diet and exercise, medication has been used to help some individuals successfully lose weight. Pharmacotherapy, however, is generally used when weight is causing other obesity-related disease. Consult your physician to see if medication is right for you.

If you are one of the many overweight Americans, take heart. You can begin taking steps to reduce your weight and improve your health and your lifestyle. Today is the day to start and you'll be amazed at how good you can feel tomorrow and the rest of your life.

Kent Pegg is a certified personal trainer and the co-owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center. If you have any questions about the information in this article you can call him at 662-5232.