

My Views

By Victor Didkowsky, CFP



Are we eating ourselves into oblivion?

It's not surprising that a lot of us could afford to lose a few pounds, and some of us could actually benefit from losing a lot more than just a few of those pounds.

Up to around age thirty, I swear both of my legs were hollow, but then all of a sudden...wham my metabolism changed and just looking at food put on weight.

What I thought you might find interesting is an article I came across in "The Insurance Journal," October 2004 issue, that has a number of statistics and organizations commenting on this bulging trend. It is written from a risk management, more specifically re-insurance perspective. Let me first explain who a re-insurer is. It is a company that for part of your premium takes part of the risk from the originating underwriting firm. By doing this, it protects the insured (you) and the risk underwriter (the insurance company) from any undo or catastrophic payout that may occur. It's their way of managing risk. These firms have very deep pockets and play in the global arena. So now on to the article.

FRIGHTENING FIGURES

The facts accumulating on weight problems and obesity are heart stopping, prompting public health officials to declare an epidemic.

In the last thirty years, Swiss Re noted, the prevalence of obesity has doubled, and even tripled, in many developed countries. One out of three people in the United States is affected. Nearly 65% of Americans lug around excess weight. In March, the Journal of the American Medical Association predicted that obesity would be the primary cause of death in the United States beginning next year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 20% of people in developed countries and eight per cent of the world population was obese in 2000.

WHO noted that in certain developed countries, obesity has already replaced infectious diseases as the leading cause of mortality.

The National Audit Office for Health Survey in Britain found that weight problems are particularly prevalent among the underprivileged.

People who have not completed high school are also at a greater risk, according to the American Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System.

In Canada, the obesity rate is up slightly, Statistics Canada reported in a study published June 15. In 2000 – 2001, 14.1% of the adult population was considered obese and 32.4% were

overweight. The number of obese Canadians grew to 14.9% in 2003, and 33.3% were overweight that year. Last year, 15.9% of women and 13.9% of men were considered obese.

Childhood obesity is troubling the experts because it often foretells chronic obesity in adulthood. This excess weight is bad news for health specialists and reinsurers because it tends to trigger a series of pathologies such as Type II diabetes (non-insulin dependent), hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

The causes of obesity are becoming better known: poor eating habits, sedentary lifestyle, lack of exercise, stress, hereditary predisposition, etc. In the past 20 years, the physical activity rate of American adolescents slumped by 13%. The Internet, video games and television have all been fingered as culprits.

Americans may be in the grips of the overweight crises, but we Canadians are only five to ten years behind.

As we enjoy the richness of the upcoming season let's keep this in mind and make conscious choices.

Regards,

Victor



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