



# INSIGHTS

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## Tipping the Scales Managing Your Weight as You Age

Flip through old family photos of previous generations and you'll be struck, as I was, by how much thinner everyone was in the good old days. Family pictures today tell a very different story. Bigger stomachs, more chins, wider backsides. In a group of men and women in their 50's, 60's and 70's today, half would appear either overweight or obese. Like everyone else, older adults are getting fatter, much fatter.

So far concern about the obesity epidemic has focused on the risks to children, but researchers are starting to wake up to the very real dangers facing older adults - not to mention the costs associated with them. People who are obese face a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and arthritis, and since those over 50 are already more vulnerable to these

diseases, they are at increased risk for the damage that excess body fat can cause. While current statistics tell us that we'll live longer than our grandparents and our parents - partly because we don't smoke as much - our excess weight is actually threatening to cancel out health gains we've assumed were ours. In fact last year the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada called fat the 'new tobacco' in its annual report card on the health of Canadians. It also reported that between 1985 and 2000, deaths attributable to overweight and obesity nearly doubled. Medical researchers are telling us that the obesity crisis among over 50's is reversing a trend of older adults getting increasingly healthier. Instead, higher obesity rates will lead to higher rates of disability among the elderly.

One recent American Medical Association study points to just how expensive obesity is for the health care system. The study examined the relationship between body mass index (BMI) in younger adults with their subsequent health care expenditures at 65 and older. Adult men who maintained a normal weight through adulthood cost the system \$7,205 a year from 65 years onward, whereas severely obese men cost \$13,674 a year.

A new report released in August 2005 by the Canadian Institute for Health Information draws a direct line between obesity rates and sharp increases in knee and hip



"Nice try Mrs. Browning"

replacement surgeries, a finding experts warn should be a wake up call for Canadians concerned about the health of their joints - and the cost of their health care.

The report showed people who were obese had joint replacement surgery at three times the rate of people with a healthy body weight. People who were overweight were twice as likely to undergo joint replacement as individuals with a healthy weight.

Carrying excess weight puts individuals at risk of developing a number of health problems, among them osteoarthritis, a condition that can lead to the need to replace knee or hip joints. The number of Canadians undergoing these operations has risen sharply in recent years. In fact, the report notes the total number of these surgeries has doubled over the last eight years, resulting in longer wait times for joint replacement operations. As baby boomers approach their 'golden years', the need for joint replacement

continued on reverse...

### The Burden of Obesity

A new report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Bearing the Impact of Obesity, shows people who are overweight or obese are much more likely to need joint replacement surgery than people of healthy weights.

- 59% of hip replacement patients were women.
- 46% of people who had joints replaced were obese, although obese people make up only 23% of the population.
- The rate of knee replacements in men aged 45 to 54 went up 99% in the past decade; in women 133%.

### Tipping the Scales, continued

surgeries will put more pressure on a system that already can't meet the demand. In Ontario, patients are currently waiting an average of 33 weeks for a knee replacement and 24 weeks for a hip replacement.

The report, which is based on figures from 2003-2004, showed that nine of ten people who had a knee replacement, and seven of ten people who had a hip replaced were overweight or obese. To put it more succinctly, forty six percent of people who had a joint replacement were considered obese, defined as having a body mass index of 30 or higher. About thirty three per cent of joint replacement patients were considered overweight, meaning their body mass index ranged from 25 to 29.9. BMI is derived from the measure of your weight in kilograms divided by your height in metres squared.

We've become fatter one extra mouthful, one larger portion and one fewer step at a time. So far no one has figured out how to reverse the trend. There needs to be an assault on obesity. It's time for a campaign similar to the one that was launched to cut-down on smoking. I understand that there is no one way to slay the obesity dragon. Just look at the dieting industry which includes diet foods, books, weight-loss programs, fitness clubs - to see that the programs are there - our will is not. We need to understand that this will be a twenty-year fight. We have to stop thinking of weight gain as a personal failing, and understand that it is an indicator of an unhealthy lifestyle - a lifestyle we share with millions. It's clear that as one size doesn't fit all, one program, one approach won't either. It's time to 'Unsuper Size' me, otherwise these old hips and knees won't be around the next time I break 80 - my golf score, not my age.

Until next time...

## HOW BEING OVERWEIGHT AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

t Obesity is a risk factor for:

- l heart disease
- l stroke
- l type 2 diabetes
- l fatty liver and gallbladder disease

t It is also associated with high blood pressure and sleep disorders such as sleep apnea.

t Osteoarthritis is also common in obese people.

t Unhealthy eating, being overweight and physical inactivity may be responsible for 30% of cancers.

t Excess weight contributes to a newly named disorder called metabolic syndrome. Doctors use the term to describe a cluster of

disorders - high blood pressure, high triglycerides and blood sugar, low levels of "good" HDL cholesterol and a large waist that greatly increases your risk of developing diabetes and heart disease.

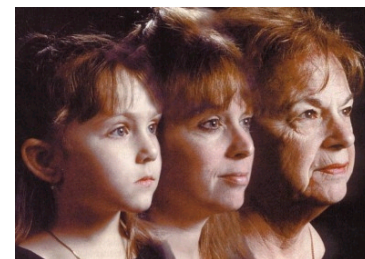
t One in ten deaths among adults aged 20 to 64 is directly attributed to excess weight. The risk of death for overweight adults rises by 16% compared to their counterparts who are at a healthy weight, and 25% for people who are obese.

t Excess weight also affects medical outcomes. For example, being obese not only increases risk of osteoarthritis, it lowers the success rate of joint replacement used to treat the problem.

### September is Healthy Aging Month

***"Grow old along with me.  
The best of life is yet to be."***

*Robert Browning*



Canadians are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. Staying fit, eating a healthy diet, and maintaining positive social relationships can lead to improved health in later years.

Many conditions traditionally regarded as inevitable outcomes of growing older are in fact treatable and even preventable. Increased physical activity, a balanced diet, and a healthy lifestyle can bring benefits at any age, including a reduced risk for some mental illnesses. Older people can continue to contribute fully to their communities by getting out and about, volunteering, or taking up a new hobby. Other members of the community can benefit greatly from the wisdom and life experiences of these older adults by including them in community events, social functions, and other activities.

What's good for the body is good for the spirit as well. As people grow older, it is very important to keep motivated - to say to yourself, "I can do it!"

#### Physical Fitness

- Choose an exercise that you like and stick with it.
- Engage in 30 minutes of aerobic exercise and weight-bearing exercise every day. This 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity can add years to your heart and your life.

We can find lots of excuses for not exercising. Long-time exercisers say these are the factors that help keep them moving:

- Have fun first. Vary your workouts to keep things interesting
- Pick your best time. Early morning hours assure available time and work well for many.
- Deal with the details. Make exercise convenient and accessible.
- Recall how good it makes you feel.

#### Social Well-Being

- Contribute time to your community through local volunteer groups, religious organizations, or civic groups.
- Stay in close contact with friends and family. Write, email, or call someone daily.

#### Mental Wellness

- Keep your mind exercised, too, by reading, learning a new skill, and researching something that interests you
- Develop a hobby - it's never too late to learn how to play the piano!