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Editorial »

Obesity is a growing problem in Ohio, with real consequences and real costs -- editorial

By **The Plain Dealer Editorial Board**
November 27, 2009, 5:00AM

Feeling a step slow today? Maybe a tad lethargic?

Could it be a little turkey-and-all-the-trimmings hangover?

We thought briefly about running an editorial about obesity in Ohio on Thanksgiving Day -- sort of a banquet of irony -- but we scrapped the idea. No matter how appropriate it would have been, it would have been inappropriate.

A feast is a feast, this one comes but once a year, and it's not our place to season your stuffing with guilt.

Today, however, is another matter.

Today, many of you have leftovers to deal with. And turkey hangovers. And -- dare we say it? -- overhangs, at the belt line.

What do you propose to do about it? And will you actually get past the proposal stage?

Last week, Plain Dealer reporter Sarah Jane Tribble wrote about a study released by Emory University researcher Kenneth E. Thorpe that predicts a U.S. obesity rate of 43 percent by 2018. He says that obesity in Ohio is likely to be even more prevalent.

Thorpe goes so far as to assign dollars-and-cents estimates to individuals for the problem of individual obesity. By his reckoning, health care services related to obesity cost the average Ohioan \$433 per year today. He puts the average cost for 2018 at \$1,877.

Accept or reject his particular numbers as you will -- and, granted, it's almost impossible to project specific health costs for almost a decade from now, especially with the nation debating an overhaul of its health care system -- but don't try to argue with the certainty that health care costs rise along with the incidence of obesity. More obesity equals more chronic (and preventable) diseases equals more treatment equals greater expense.

Quibble if you like with where physicians draw the lines that separate "acceptable" body mass from "overweight" and "obese." Point out, as you should, that for many people, obesity is a chronic medical, genetic and lifestyle problem too overwhelming to change easily. But don't discount the known effects of obesity on health. Increased risk of diabetes, stroke, heart attack and some forms of cancer all are associated with obesity.

Ohio's children, too, are ballooning at alarming rates -- and here's where the change in parental attitudes and in state and school policies is most urgently

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needed. Habits like overeating, eating unwisely and avoiding exercise begun at an early age won't be easy to break later.

Ohio's lawmakers are pondering ways to help their constituents, young and old, get into better shape and avoid weighty problems in the future. One way would be to see that young people, especially, are served healthy food.

State support for programs that grow fresh fruit and vegetables in urban garden plots for consumption from urban plates would be especially helpful. So would banning soft drinks from schools and a return to state-mandated physical education.

But for a lot of Ohioans, eating well and exercising ought to just be a part of living responsibly -- for their own sake and the sake of their families.

So eat light today. Take the dog for a run. Better yet, take the kid for a run. Or the neighbor's kid.

It not as hard as you think it is, and it's a lot easier than recuperating from a heart attack.

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Posted by **donkeytruth**
 November 27, 2009, 6:54AM

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