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- |
- [Relationships](#)
- |
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- |
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- |

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[Arthur Agatston, M.D.](#)

Leading preventive cardiologist and author of *The South Beach Diet*

Posted: July 30, 2009 12:20 PM

The Real Cost of Obesity

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No matter what health care delivery system this country adopts, no matter what plan or series of plans are enacted, ongoing obesity epidemic if we don't act now. President Obama talks about adopting a plan that's revenue neutral. E compete with this frightening trend.

This week we learned that spending on obesity-related medical issues jumped 82 percent from 2001 to 2006, with th

But these startling stats really aren't that startling when you also learn that two-thirds of American adults and one-thi overweight or obese. Today, the typical baby boomer male weighs just shy of 200 pounds and the average baby bo afraid this isn't news for us preventive cardiologists. Unfortunately, we treat obese patients with heart disease, predi obesity-related ailments in our practices every day.

And it's not just cardiologists who deal with these issues. Many people with weight problems look to their primary-ca the bulge. But the sad fact is that most doctors don't have the practical experience to make a dent in this epidemic, a

Fighting obesity is really a public health issue that must be centered in individual communities, workplaces, and sch education. And the initiative must get into high gear now.

We need to create communities where fresh and healthier food, not just fast food, is within easy access, where there encourage physical activity, where the opportunity to exercise is more widely available in the workplace. We need s mandatory and playgrounds are plentiful. We need schools that teach our children about healthy eating at an early a

"science labs" that excite kids about eating what they grow). And in those same schools we need healthier cafeteria machines. Furthermore, we need to encourage busy families to sit down at the dinner table together, even if it's only

And we can't stop there. There's no argument that fresh vegetables are better for kids than potato chips and that regular healthy body. But while we know these ideas work, we should never become complacent. We should always be even in an economic climate, we need to continually be investing research dollars (and perhaps some of that stimulus money) and must never stop looking for new ways to make our nation healthier.

Unless we do something soon, the billions we're currently paying in weight-related medical bills will seem like a drop in the bucket. Obesity-related costs *alone* can sink any health care system we put into place in this country.

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