



Why Healthcare Costs Are Skyrocketing

If you listen to the news regarding ever-escalating healthcare costs, you know there appears to be no end in sight. Legislators who wish to address this issue believe the only answer is to redesign and limit Medicare and Medicaid for future generations and to cap drug prices. Managed care companies are continuing to negotiate for even bigger price cuts and raising their rates to employers and people like you and me. Employers are limiting or eliminating health insurance. But do these efforts address the root cause of increasing healthcare costs? Sadly, no.

Like it or not, we must all come to terms with the fact that over half of healthcare costs are COMPLETELY AVOIDABLE. This is because at least 33% of costs are due to the effects of just three things: tobacco, alcohol and obesity.

Just what do we spend annually for healthcare in the US? According to a study sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, we spend about \$8000 per year per citizen, more than any other industrial country. The CDC puts that number a bit over \$10,000 per US adult. With a total population of about 300 million, this totals about \$3.5 trillion. To give you a sense of perspective, this is 5 times more than the total annual defense department budget!

Since I believe in celebrating successes, let's start with what we have already done to turn this around. In 1965 about 43% of adults in the US smoked. What is that number today? You no doubt will be glad to hear that as of 2010, that number had fallen to about 22% and by 2018 it was 14%--this is wonderful progress! According to the CDC, though, as income and education decline, the rate of smoking increases so those among us least able to afford higher healthcare costs have the highest rate of smoking. Nonetheless, while there are still about 35 million adults in the US that smoke costing about \$170B, the trend is headed in the right direction. We all need to continue to support our loved ones in living a tobacco-free life.

About two-thirds of American adults report they drink alcohol. This has remained quite consistent for over 70 years. Of these, about 13 million people identify themselves as heavy drinkers. Healthcare expenditures associated with alcohol abuse total about \$249 billion annually. While not insignificant, the number of people abusing alcohol is at least not growing.

The most serious problem facing us and profoundly affecting healthcare costs is obesity. In 1950, about 10% of US adults were obese. Today that rate is about 35% with another 30% overweight. Childhood obesity wasn't even "a thing" in 1950. It was first monitored in the early 80's. Today it has reached about 20%. And the consequences to our health, insurance rates, and pocketbooks is profound. It is estimated that the annual cost for obesity alone is \$147B in direct healthcare costs. We spend another \$131B on cardiac and stroke indications, both of which are related to obesity. And diabetes costs an additional \$237B.

What can one do about this? What we are doing is not working and the ongoing public debate is clearly not helping either. I suggest three fundamental shifts in perspective could meaningfully shift this trend:

1. It is vitally important that we all recognize and accept our own responsibility in reversing preventable conditions and diseases that drive up costs in our healthcare system
2. Our choices have been a part of the problem...it is time to make them a part of the solution
3. Better choices require that we educate ourselves about our biologies, the strengths and weaknesses of our food supply, the benefits of physical activity, and how to achieve better emotional health.

Much of what we have been taught about how to eat, exercise, and change habits is outdated or hopelessly confusing due to a multiplicity of conflicting studies, opinions, and theories. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we accept our responsibility in rising healthcare costs and become part of the solution. This is, in fact, one of the more important reasons I have started Three Dimensional Health, LLC and am offering *Freeing People from the Tyranny of Diets* seminars. Whether this feels like the right solution for you or not, I hope you will commit to furthering your own health and wellness today!

<https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/costs/index.htm>

<http://www.kaiseredu.org/issue-modules/us-health-care-costs/background-brief.aspx>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/rickungar/2012/04/30/obesity-now-costs-americans-more-in-healthcare-costs-than-smoking/>