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# The Health Reformer

## **Preventable diseases take a significant toll on businesses, workers, and the nation**

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson... released a new report ("Prevention Makes Common Cents") highlighting the significant economic toll that preventable diseases take on businesses, workers and the nation. The report highlights the importance for employers to make health promotion part of their business strategy.

...."The choices we make about diet, activity and tobacco affect not only our own lives, but also affect the economic health of our families, our businesses and even our nation as a whole," Secretary Thompson said. "More businesses need to recognize that poor health means lower productivity and higher health insurance costs. Smart business leaders increasingly are finding that it is the right decision to promote health education, physical activity and preventive benefits in the workplace."

The new HHS report summarizes key research findings about the prevalence and cost of chronic diseases where prevention and health management can make a difference -- including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and asthma. Individual choices that lead to overweight and obesity, lack of physical activity and smoking greatly increase the risk of these diseases.

The report highlights recent research showing the dramatic impact of chronic, preventable illnesses have on business' bottom line:

- Obesity-related health problems cost U.S. businesses an estimated \$13 billion in 1994, including about \$8 billion in health insurance costs, \$2.4 billion for sick leave, \$1.8 billion for life insurance and nearly \$1 billion for disability insurance.
- Average health care expenditures for people with diabetes run about \$13,243 per person, compared with \$2,650 per person for people without diabetes. Even after the differences in age, sex, race and ethnicity are taken into account, people with diabetes had medical expenditures that were 2.4 times higher than comparable people without diabetes.
- One economic analysis found that a health plan's annual costs for covering treatments to help people quit smoking ranged from 89 cents to \$4.92 per smoker, while the annual costs of treating smoking-related illness ranged from \$6 to \$33 per smoker.

The report also notes that the majority of businesses with at least 50 employees offer some kind of health improvement program. It provides examples of health promotion and disease prevention activities that

businesses are using successfully to reduce the impact of these chronic illnesses.

"Employers are becoming more aware that overweight and obesity, lack of physical activity, and tobacco use are impacting the health and productivity of their employees and ultimately, the businesses' bottom line," the report states. "As a result, innovative employers are providing their employees with a variety of work-site-based health promotion and disease prevention programs. These programs have been shown to improve employee health, increase productivity and yield a significant return on investment for the employer."

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## **The Tobacco-Crime Link: A hidden truth**

"It is an undisputable fact, and one that should give us considerable concern, that . . . nearly all criminals are cigarette smokers. . . . [Toxicity] present in the smoke of the cigarette acts upon the brain cells and nerve tissues in such a manner as to bring about a degeneracy of these structures . . . develops criminal tendencies. . . . Whenever I read of a dastardly crime's having been committed, by inquiry I have found that in practically every such case the criminal was a cigarette addict. Go with me to any . . . court and ask the judge what percentage of . . . offenders . . . are cigarette smokers. He will tell you that nearly all of them are. I have never heard a lower estimate than 93 per cent."

—Daniel H. Kress, M.D., *The Cigarette As A Physician Sees It* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Ass'n, 1931), p 67.

"[C]igarettes are . . . making criminals . . . . Cigarettes are not the effect of crime, but they are the cause of it. . . . Dr. Gentry, of Chicago, says . . . "The only way to stop the increase of . . . criminals . . . is to stop the use of tobacco, and also the raising and manufacture of it. . . . The use of tobacco is a great crime."

—Theodore F. Frech and Luther H. Higley, *The Evils of Tobacco and Cigarettes* (Butler, Indiana: Higley Printing Co, 1916), pp 123-124.

"[J]udges of juvenile courts everywhere recognize the close relationship that exists between cigarettes and crime. . . . Not only does the use of cigarettes produce a criminal tendency . . . it also produces what might be termed [psychopathy aka abulia aka anomie aka empathy-loss] . . . a condition in which lying, thieving, and murder become as natural as eating and drinking . . . ."

—Bernarr MacFadden, *The Truth about Tobacco* (New York:

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*Physical Culture Corp.*, 1924), pp 87 and 77, respectively, describing the psychopath ("predator") concept, as per smoker deviance/licentiousness.

"What has been called a 'crime wave' in the United States the past few years has been misnamed. It is not a wave. It is a harvest—the natural result of the sowing . . . 'Sow tobacco, and reap crime.' The Criminal, published for detectives and police officers, says 93 per cent of all criminals use tobacco before committing the crimes leading to their arrests. . . . Hon. George Torrance says: 'Of 4,117 boys received into the Illinois State Reformatory, since its organization on Jan. 8, 1893, 95 per cent had the tobacco habit, and nearly all were cigarette smokers.'" —Will H. Brown, *Tobacco Under the Searchlight* (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co, 1925), pp 62-64.

"The cigarette is often responsible for the worst sort of insanity—moral insanity; more than half the shocking crimes we hear of being committed by young lads are directly traceable to the cigarette habit. This is tobacco in the worst form. It deadens the sensibilities [including empathy for victims], wrecks the nervous system, weakens the brain, and all the evils of over-stimulation are the natural result."

—Dr. Bremen, cited by Meta Lander in *The Tobacco Problem* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1882), p 166.

"Investigations in prisons, and houses of correction, and State reform schools show that a vast majority of their inmates used Tobacco before they committed crime. . . . 'The more Tobacco, . . . the more . . . licentiousness, crime.'"

—B. W. Chase, M.A., *Tobacco: Its Physical, Mental, Moral and Social Influences* (New York: Wm. B. Mucklow Pub, 1878), pp 70-71.

Note: "Tobacco and liquor lie at the foundation of a large share of the crime and violence that is polluting our world" (*Signs of the Times*, October 5, 1876 par. 9).

"The use of liquor or tobacco destroys the sensitive nerves of the brain, and benumbs the sensibilities. Under their influence crimes are committed that would have been left undone had the mind been clear and free from the influence of stimulants or narcotics" (*Temperance*, p.59).

### ***Fiber is disappearing from the American diets***

Where's the fiber?

...From breakfast to dinner, fiber is disappearing from the American diet, as high-margin, eat-on-the-go packaged foods replace basic foodstuffs. On one level, fiber has been on its way out for decades, through the high-speed processing of raw commodities such as fruit and grain. But its disappearance is being hastened now, as a side effect of the food industry's drive to develop snacks and easy-to-prepare dishes to replace what used to be called square meals.

The fiber erosion is occurring just as experts are warning of a critical fiber deficiency in the U.S. After the flash-in-the-pan fiber craze of the late 1980s, fiber's reputation took a hit amid conflicting research into its role in preventing colon cancer.

But studies this year have underscored the connection, and now the national scarcity of dietary fiber is being more carefully scrutinized for its role in everything from heart disease to obesity to diverticulitis, a rapidly growing intestinal disease.

"The diets we consume are highly processed and depleted in fiber, and that has a major adverse impact on health," says Edward Giovannucci, associate professor of medicine at Harvard University's school of public health.

Warning that Americans are eating only about half the 25 grams of fiber they need daily, the American Dietetic Association says persuading people to eat more fiber-rich plant foods could have a "significant impact on the prevention and

treatment of obesity, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes."

High-fiber foods, including many fruits and vegetables, act as an appetite suppressant, helping slow the absorption of nutrients in the gut and leaving a person feeling full longer and less likely to overeat.

...It is hard to find much fiber at all in many packaged foods. Top-selling brands of pasta, breakfast bars, cereal and bread are made with refined wheat. Whole-grain pasta often has triple the quantity of fiber found in popular pasta brands. A cup of cooked brown rice typically has four grams of fiber, or four times the fiber found in refined white rice.

...Getting the recommended amount of fiber daily is "an insurance policy for a whole slew of health diseases," says Mark Andon, a nutrition scientist for PepsiCo Inc.'s Quaker, Tropicana and Gatorade lines.

...Long dismissed simply as "roughage," fiber is basically the remnants of plants that the human digestive system cannot break down. Fiber provides no nutrients, but its ride through the 30-foot digestive tract is greatly beneficial because it helps push along other waste.

Soluble fiber, which dissolves in water and is found in oat bran, beans and barley, among other foods, helps prevent cholesterol from being absorbed into the blood stream. Insoluble fiber, found in wheat bran and some fruits and vegetables, helps promote regularity.

Decades-old practices of high-speed factory processing purge food of much of its natural fiber. With wheat, for instance, millers routinely separate the small but highly nutritious bran and germ of the raw wheat, leaving only the starchy aftermath, the endosperm, for white flour.

That refined flour, which doesn't spoil as quickly as whole-grain flour, allows food companies to produce mass quantities of packaged food faster.

White flour also has a clean taste and a less-gritty texture that's easier on the palate and less vexing to packaged food formulations.

But refined flour is also less nutritious, with 77 percent less fiber, 21 percent less protein and 54 percent less calcium than whole-grain flour, according to an analysis of nutrients from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Some of the nutrients, but usually not the fiber, are restored if the flour is fortified.

Of course, there are some attempts to bring more high-fiber foods into the grocery store. Major bakers like Sara Lee Corp. now offer loaves of whole-grain bread, made with the entire edible part of the grain, including the fiber-rich bran.

New World Pasta Co., one of the biggest players in its market, is selling a line of Prince pasta products called Healthy Harvest, which blend traditional semolina with whole wheat. The new pasta has 50 percent more fiber than regular pasta "without the grainy texture," according to New World.

By Michael J. McCarthy  
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