



The Real Cost of Physical Inactivity

With bills to pay and a range of costs increasing, it's not unexpected that we have to look at what we spend and limit where we spend it. When the budget comes under scrutiny it is often our recreation and exercise costs or memberships that face being cut along with other 'non essential' items.

However, the cost of your gym membership, trainer or class may be cheaper than the cost long term of not exercising both to yourself in time and money and to our country. New Zealand, along with the rest of the world is facing a dramatic increase of medical and health costs due to lifestyle factors and inactivity.

A 2010 survey in NZ commissioned by local councils put the cost of inactivity at 1.3 billion dollars. Inactivity and other lifestyle factors create a serious financial burden, and we aren't just talking the odd sick day. While the government is picking up the tab in most cases, when it comes to serious illness and disease, we pay in the end through taxes and other costs.

The Ministry of Health suggests that up to one third of health loss is preventable, with some of the greater challenges being our diet, physical inactivity and the obesity epidemic. These challenges require more than a well-financed health system, but also a whole of society response.

The increase in the waistlines of New Zealanders has led to an increase of health related illnesses. The 2008/09 New Zealand Adult Nutrition Survey found that one in three adults were overweight (37.0%) and one in four were obese (27.8%). With a population of 4.4 million, over 1,000,000 New Zealanders can be classified as 'obese'.

The cost of obesity is in part its relationship with some serious health issues including Type 2 diabetes, ischaemic heart disease (IHD), stroke, several common cancers, osteoarthritis, sleep apnoea and reproductive abnormalities which lead to loss of income and stretch our health dollar.

Behavioural risk factors (including unhealthy diet and physical inactivity) are responsible for about 80% of coronary heart disease worldwide. It's a simple fact that a sedentary lifestyle is one of the major risk factors to heart disease, a risk factor that is easily controlled through moderate regular exercise.

A recent research study from the team at Liverpool's John Moores University found that exercise not only helps prevent heart disease, but may actually repair heart tissue already damaged. The research reported in the European Heart Journal showed that regular and strenuous (enough to make you sweat) exercise may lead to the development of new heart muscle. The researchers suggest that damage from heart disease or failure could be at least partially repaired through 30 minutes of running or cycling a day, at enough intensity to work up a sweat.

According to the Mental Health Foundation there is increasing evidence linking physical activity and improving mental health. At least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week can improve mood and decrease anxiety and stress. Physical activity is also thought to have a role in preventing serious mental illness such as depression. It is those feel good chemicals endorphins that hold some of the benefits for mood and mental health. They are the body's natural painkillers and are responsible for that positive feeling experienced after physical activity.

Either we open our wallets for increased government support of lifestyle diseases caused by inactivity, OR we can open up the front door and get out there and exercise.

The cost to repair the damage caused by an unhealthy lifestyle and inactivity

Coronary artery bypass graft (rechannel blood flow to the heart)
\$38,000 - \$57,000

Cardiac angiogram (diagnostic test for suspected heart disease)
\$3,800 - \$4,800

Gastric Bypass (a common weight loss procedure)
\$17,000 - \$35,000

Osteoarthritis (a common side effect of diabetes)
Total hip replacement
\$19,000 - \$25,000

Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

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NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) - Independent not for profit quality mark of exercise professionals and facilities. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the "warrant of fitness check" that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver safe exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

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Exercise Association of New Zealand - Not for profit exercise industry representative organisation. Its *mission is to proactively support a sustainable exercise and fitness industry in New Zealand by growing participation in structured exercise through advocacy, information and industry standards.*

