

A MODEST WEIGHT-LOSS PROPOSAL

AS A PRACTICING PHYSICIAN IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME WHEN AN OVERWEIGHT PATIENT DOESN'T FOLLOW MY ADVICE. AFTER A YALE UNIVERSITY LIBERAL-ARTS EDUCATION, A DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY, FOUR YEARS OF MEDICAL SCHOOL, AN INTERNAL MEDICINE RESIDENCY, FOUR YEARS OF EMERGENCY ROOM WORK AND MORE...WHERE DID I GO WRONG?

USUALLY PEOPLE RESPOND POSITIVELY TO MY GRAVITAS AND DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE. THE RECOMMENDATIONS I GIVE CAN MAKE AN ENORMOUS DIFFERENCE...AFTER ALL, WE ARE TALKING ABOUT LIFE-SHORTENING, DEBILITATING CHRONIC ILLNESSES, THE ONES PRECIPITATED AND WORSENERD BY OVERWEIGHT.

WHY DON'T MOST OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE AMERICANS SLAVISHLY FOLLOW THE WARNINGS OF THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY? IT'S CERTAINLY NOT FROM LACK OF PUBLICITY: EVERY NEWSPAPER AND TELEVISION SHOW SEEMS TO HAVE AN ARTICLE OR SEGMENT DEVOTED TO HEALTH ISSUES. YET ONLY 5-10% OF DIETERS KEEP THE POUNDS OFF PERMANENTLY AND NEVER REVERT TO THEIR FORMER BAD HABITS. WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE OTHER 90%? AREN'T THEY AFRAID OF DEATH?

SOMEWHAT SHEEPISHLY I HAVE OFTEN POSED TO COLLEAGUES THE HYPOTHESIS THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE DIET THAT WOULD REALLY WORK WONDERS. I CALL IT THE APRIL 15TH DIET. DON'T BOTHER TO LOOK FOR THE RECIPE BOOK, SPIN-OFF PRODUCTS, OR IN FACT ANY NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION. ON THE APRIL 15TH

DIET YOU CAN EAT UNLIMITED PORTIONS OF ANYTHING THAT YOU WANT FOR ALMOST 365 DAYS. SOUNDS TERRIFIC, NO?

THEN ON APRIL 15TH OF EVERY YEAR YOU WILL REPORT TO THE LOCAL POST OFFICE. AFTER YOUR RETINA SCAN AND DNA SAMPLE PASS INSPECTION, YOU WILL HAND THE CLERK A NOTARIZED COPY OF YOUR PREVIOUS YEAR'S INCOME TAX RETURNS. YOU WILL THEN STEP ONTO A SPECIAL SCALE THAT WILL MEASURE HEIGHT AND WEIGHT, IMMEDIATELY CALCULATING YOUR BODY MASS INDEX. A BAR-CODE STICKER WILL BE PRINTED AND AFFIXED TO YOUR TAX RETURN. THEN YOU ARE DONE FOR THE DAY.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER YOU WILL RECEIVE AN ENVELOPE FROM THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE. THEY WILL HAVE AUDITED YOUR TAX RETURN AND CALCULATED YOUR REFUND. THIS AMOUNT, HOWEVER, WILL BE ADJUSTED DOWNWARDS FOR EVERY UNIT OF BODY MASS INDEX HIGHER THAN IDEAL. ONLY PEOPLE WHO DEMONSTRATE SUFFICIENT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SELF-CONTROL, AND SUCCESSFUL RESULTS WILL QUALIFY FOR A FULL REFUND. INCOMPLETE EFFORTS, "TRYING" OR TOTAL NEGLECT WILL LEAD TO INCREMENTALLY INCREASING DEDUCTION FROM THE FUNDS. PARENTS ARE ALSO PENALIZED FOR THE BEHAVIOR AND OVERWEIGHT OF THEIR CHILDREN.

THE MONEY SAVED BY INSTITUTING THIS PROGRAM WOULD BE INCALCULABLE. SINCE OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE AMERICAN WILL EVENTUALLY DIVERT MONEY FROM THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM TO PAY FOR THEIR INSULIN INJECTIONS, CARDIAC SURGERY, DIALYSIS

TREATMENTS AND SEEING-EYE DOGS, IT IS ECONOMICALLY WISER TO EXTRACT SOME SORT OF PRE-PAYMENT BEFOREHAND. ILLNESSES THAT AFFECT ALL PEOPLE EQUALLY (CANCER, INFLUENZA, BROKEN BONES) SHOULD BE "PAID FOR" BY ALL CITIZENS SINCE THEY ARE ALL MORE OR LESS AT IDENTICAL RISK. HOWEVER, THE CONCERNED CITIZEN OF THE FUTURE MIGHT ASK HIS OBESE NEIGHBOR: "YOU PAY FOR YOUR OWN ICE CREAM. WHY SHOULD I SHARE THE COST OF YOUR MEDICATION, HOSPITALIZATION AND NURSING CARE?"

AMERICANS SHARE ONLY TWO THINGS IN COMMON: DEATH AND TAXES. THE FEAR OF PREMATURE DEATH IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO LOSE WEIGHT. THE POSSIBLE LOSS OF DISPOSABLE INCOME, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD CERTAINLY CHANGE HEARTS, MINDS AND BELLIES VERY QUICKLY. MEMBERSHIPS IN HEALTH CLUBS WOULD SKY-ROCKET, ESPECIALLY IN MARCH. NUTRITIONISTS, RATHER THAN ACCOUNTANTS, WOULD HAVE TO WORK AROUND THE CLOCK IN EARLY APRIL. COBWEBS AND TUMBLEWEEDS WOULD SURROUND FAST-FOOD STORES, AND LONG LINES WOULD FORM AT SALAD BARS AT THE CRACK OF DAWN.

GET ANGRY, STAMP YOUR FEET, WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR! I KNOW THAT THE APRIL 15TH DIET IS THE WORST DIET THAT YOU EVER HEARD OF...BUT BOY WOULD IT WORK!