

Sick of exercising? Sicker if you don't

Biologist: Inactivity linked to 17 diseases

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — University of Missouri-Columbia biologist Frank Booth calls it evidence of a modern plague.

People dying of heart disease, up 37 percent since 1950. People developing Type 2 diabetes, up 600 percent since 1958. Still more people with backaches, with osteoporosis, with high blood pressure.

There is a common contributor to all these people's maladies, Booth says. They are simply not getting enough exercise.

Call it inactivity, sloth, inertia.

To Booth, our sedentary way of life has become one of our greatest health hazards. And it's time, he says, that doctors and scientists rally to the cause of exercise.

In the latest issue of the *Journal of Applied Physiology*, Booth and colleagues at the University of Texas have published a manifesto for physical activity. It marshals the work of dozens of researchers to make their case.

Inactivity is linked to at least 17 chronic diseases and other health conditions, Booth found. And it is responsible for about 250,000 deaths each year in the United States. That is more deaths than are caused by alcohol, firearms, illicit drugs and motor-vehicle accidents combined.

Only smoking, which kills 400,000 people a year, causes more preventable deaths.

The cost of treating all these inactivity-related illnesses, Booth estimated, approaches \$1 trillion per year.

"Why is this going on? Why a sixfold increase in diabetes? Why aren't people beating the walls to stop this? This should not be happening in the United States," Booth said.

Booth has started an advocacy group, *Scientists Against Inactivity-Related Diseases*, to promote the study of maladies caused by sedentary living.

And he has started an Internet petition drive, gathering signatures of scientists and physicians, to ask the National Institutes of Health to finance more basic research on how physical inactivity leads to disease.

"We know it happens," Booth said. "But we don't know how. We need to know that in order to combat the problem."

To Booth, exercise is not just something extra you do to pump up your muscles or to drop a few pounds. It is as essential to good health as clean air, pure water and nutritious food.

Booth traces our generally sedentary lifestyle back about 100 years. Before then most people stayed active at work and at home. Machinery, however, has eased the burden of physical labor, cars have eliminated the need to walk, television has kept us glued to our couches.

According to an estimate by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 22 percent of adults engage in any kind of daily leisure-time physical activity. About 15 percent do vigorous exercise, such as running, on a regular basis. Health experts recommend that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, equivalent to a two-mile walk, preferably every day.