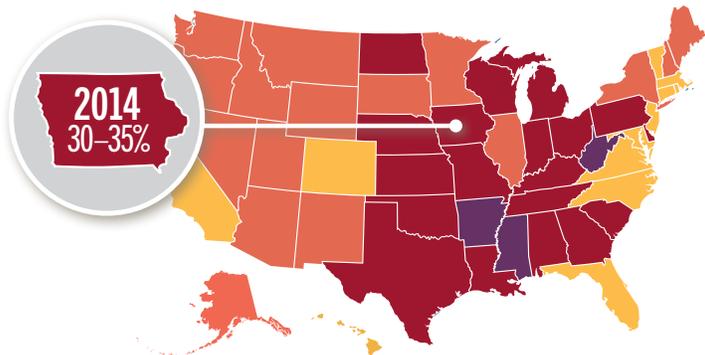
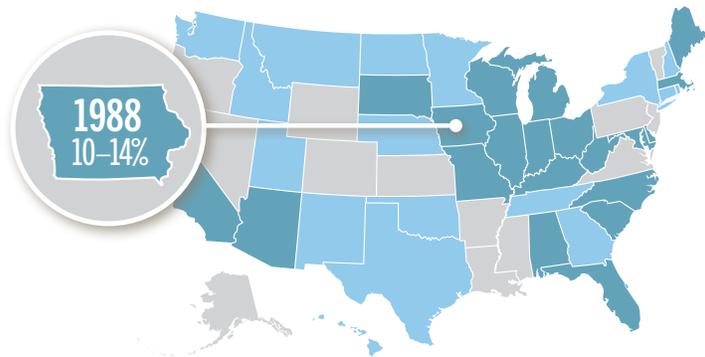


# THE HEALTH OF IOWANS

HEALTH CARE TRENDS AND ISSUES | OCTOBER 2016

## OBESITY TRENDS AMONG U.S. ADULTS



■ No Data ■ <10% ■ 10-14% ■ 15-20% ■ 20-24% ■ 25-29% ■ 30-35% ■ >35%

Source: CDC.gov/obesity/data/prevalence-maps

At Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield, we cover more Iowans than any other insurer. By taking some time to step back and look at how our members are truly using their health insurance, we are able to identify information that provides insight into the health of all Wellmark members in Iowa. Using Wellmark data, the Health of Iowans identifies the issues and trends that are the most costly across all Wellmark members in Iowa.

## WHAT THE DATA SHOW

### OBESITY IS GROWING AT EPIDEMIC LEVELS

Obesity rates have drastically increased over the past 25 years. In 1988, 14 percent of adults in Iowa were obese<sup>1</sup>. The rate grew to 30.9 percent<sup>2</sup> in 2014.

If obesity was a contagious disease, it would be considered an epidemic not only in Iowa, but across the entire country. Epidemiologists point to our environment. Portion sizes in restaurants have grown by four times the recommended amount. Communities have become more focused on making

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/prevalence-maps.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/table-adults.html>

it easier for cars than pedestrians, walkers, runners and bikers. Schools have reduced recess time, opting to bus kids to school — rather than walking — and serve processed foods for lunch. Workplaces have become more sedentary due to increases in technology. Even our homes are jam-packed with conveniences that don't require as much manual labor as in the past — garage door openers, remote controls for TV, etc. And if that wasn't enough, there is evidence that if your closest friend is obese, your likelihood of becoming obese increases by 57 percent<sup>3</sup>.

Experts suggest there are more than 50 diseases linked to obesity including several cancers, diabetes, heart conditions, arthritis, and depression. And, many of these health risks and chronic conditions are avoidable. These persistent conditions lead to lifelong disability, compromised quality of life, premature death that could have been prevented, and burgeoning health care costs.

**OBESITY IS LINKED TO HIGH-COST CONDITIONS**



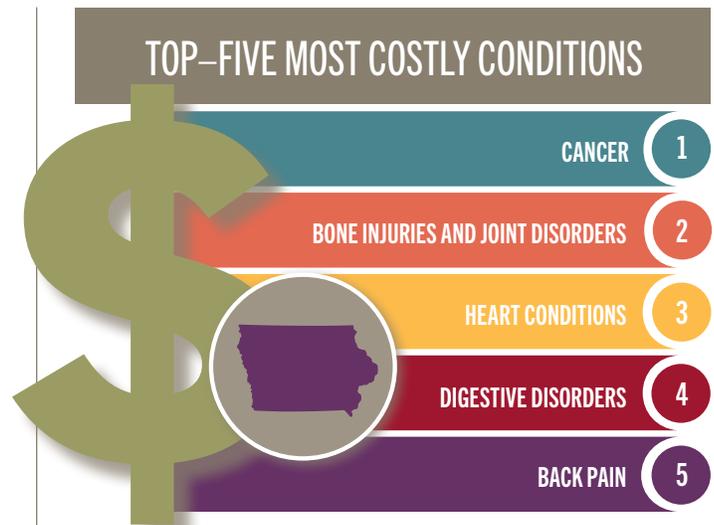
**CONDITIONS OF IOWANS**

Obesity is a common, underlying factor that contributes to the most costly conditions among Wellmark members in Iowa. Some conditions are more prevalent than others.

The top-five most costly conditions include:

**Cancer:** Topping the list is one word you hope you never hear: cancer. Last year, 17,140 new cancer cases were diagnosed in Iowa<sup>4</sup>. There is no denying that this is a life-changing diagnosis. And with numbers like this, it is hard not to know someone who has been impacted by this disease. But did you know that

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMs066082>  
<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cancer.org/research/cancerfactsstatistics/cancerfactsfigures2015/>  
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/obesity/obesity-fact-sheet>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://costprojections.cancer.gov/annual.costs.html>



obesity can contribute to various forms of cancer? Obesity is associated with increased risk of several types of cancers including: esophageal, pancreatic, colon and rectum, breast (after menopause), endometrial, kidney, thyroid, and gallbladder<sup>5</sup>. Although there are some variances in cost by the cancer type and severity, the costs are high and no one wants to face this challenge. The average cost to treat pancreatic cancer, as an example, is \$187,544<sup>6</sup>.

**Bone injuries and joint disorders:** The second most costly category is bone injuries and joint disorders. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association reports the average cost for a knee replacement is \$31,124 and hip replacement is \$30,124. It should be no surprise that excess weight places strain on bones, muscles and joints leading to serious injuries, disabilities or diseases that could have been prevented, creating a healthier, pain-free life.

**Heart conditions:** Heart disease develops quietly over time, and its effects can be costly or even deadly. You may not have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, but that doesn't mean you are not at risk. Because heart disease knows no limits, take the first step by standing on the scale. Even a few extra pounds can be hard on your heart. This means your heart needs to pump harder to supply blood to all your cells. Your heart can suffer from the increased workload leading to other heart conditions such as abnormal heart rhythm, heart attack or heart failure. The national average for bypass surgery hovers around \$50,000.

**Digestive disorders:** The health of your digestive system has a lot to do with lifestyle — the food you eat, the amount of exercise you get, and the level of daily stress. Paying attention to these factors alone can improve your overall quality life and fend off any digestive disorders.

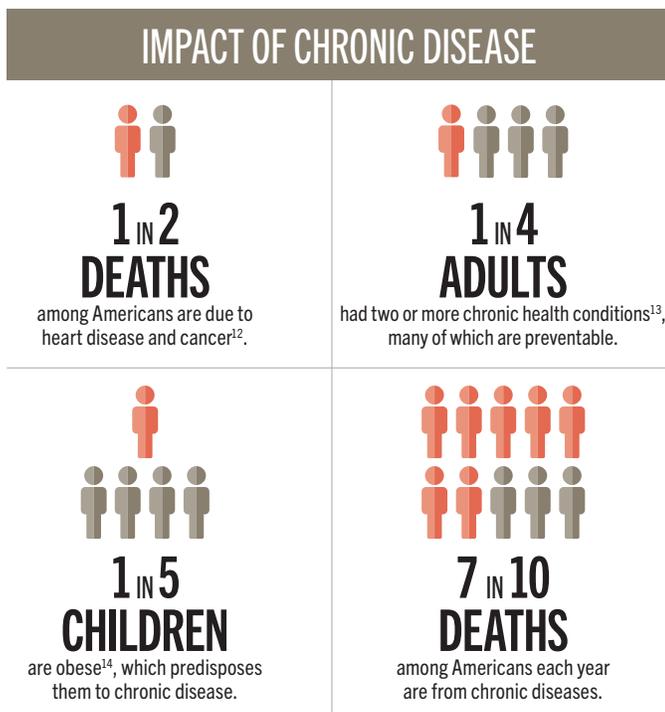
Research also shows that people who are obese may have more digestive problems<sup>7</sup>. Obesity is also a contributing factor for those with acid-related disorders. However, not all digestive disorders are a result of lifestyle. For example, some digestive diseases, like Crohn’s disease, can be hereditary. Your chances of getting it are higher if a close family member has the disease. Drugs used to treat Crohn’s disease and other gastrointestinal conditions can cost upwards of \$20,000 annually<sup>8</sup>.

**Back pain:** There is a common misperception that back pain is only age-related. And, it is true with age, your body changes based on the physical demands placed on it throughout the years. However, your back and spine become even more susceptible if you carry excess weight. Did you know, the average cost for a herniated disc surgery is approximately \$13,000<sup>9</sup>? Also, recent studies have shown that sitting for long periods of time can be deadly<sup>10</sup>. Sitting or sedentary activities such as driving, using the computer or watching TV, shouldn’t comprise more than four to five hours of a person’s day. Adhering to this will not only reduce the strain placed on the back, it can improve your overall lifestyle.

## OBESITY CONTRIBUTES TO CHRONIC DISEASES

Several conditions that fall into the most costly categories are also considered chronic diseases. A chronic disease is defined as a condition that lasts three months or more and generally cannot be prevented by vaccines or cured by medication<sup>11</sup>.

Chronic diseases are impossible to reverse — you don’t want to get one. The good news is there are several things you can do to prevent this from happening.



## PREVENTIVE CARE CAN INFLUENCE OUTCOMES

One out of every two Wellmark members in Iowa is taking advantage of preventive care visits that encourage an ongoing relationship with a doctor and, help to identify health problems before they become more serious. It is important to schedule these visits even when you are not sick. The choice is simple — invest the time now to stay in good health or pay for it down the road. A healthy lifestyle not only gives back physically but also financially.

### HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED TODAY?

#### Get up and get moving!

Did you know performing a physical activity at a level equivalent to brisk walking for up to 75 minutes per week can add 1.8 years in life expectancy relative to no leisure time activity<sup>15</sup>? And if you are active above 150 minutes of brisk walking per week — it could add 3.4 – 4.5 years to your life? This is because increasing your physical activity helps reduce your risk of obesity and chronic conditions that negatively impact your health.

That doesn’t mean you need to go from doing nothing to running a marathon. It simply means adding a little more movement in a way that fits into your lifestyle.

- Try walking to a destination that is only a few blocks away instead of driving. For example, walk to church, school, work or the grocery store.
- Opt for the stairs instead of the elevator.

In fact, the U.S. Surgeon General is calling on Americans to be more physically active and for the nation to better support walking and walkability for people of all ages and abilities<sup>16</sup>. Simply put, walking for better health may seem simplistic, but sometimes the most important things we can do are also the easiest and most obvious<sup>17</sup>.

Iowa’s Healthiest State Initiative has a variety of resources and tools designed for individuals, schools, worksites and communities to make it easier for Iowans to get moving and live healthier. Visit [www.iowahealthieststateinitiative.com](http://www.iowahealthieststateinitiative.com) to learn more.

<sup>7</sup> American Gastroenterological Association (2002, reapproved 2008). AGA technical review on obesity. *Gastroenterology*, 123(3): 882-932. [Erratum in *Gastroenterology*, 123(5): 1752.]  
<sup>8</sup> <http://www.webmd.com/ibd-crohns-disease/cd-help-with-drug-costs>  
<sup>9</sup> <http://www.medpagetoday.com/painmanagement/backpain/10874>  
<sup>10</sup> <http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/news/20150119/too-much-sitting-can-be-deadly-even-if-you-exercise-review-finds#1>  
<sup>11</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<sup>12</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Death and Mortality. NCHS FastStats Web site. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>.  
<sup>13</sup> Ward BW, Schiller JS, Goodman RA. Multiple chronic conditions among US adults: a 2012 update. *Prev Chronic Dis*. 2014;11:130389. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd11.130389>  
<sup>14</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NCHS Obesity Data. [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/factsheets/factsheet\\_obesity.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/factsheets/factsheet_obesity.htm).  
<sup>15</sup> <http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001335#abstract2>  
<sup>16</sup> <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/walking-and-walkable-communities/exec-summary.html>  
<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/walking/call-to-action/pdf/slideset.pdf>

