

The Recession and Health

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Bottom Line at the Top: The recession sucks, has been with us for a year and a half and, like all recessions, is slow to resolve. Wallow in anger and despair or look at it as a sea of change that might lead to new habits - ideally good habits that could last a lifetime.

A local restaurateur told me, “The only restaurants doing well in this recession are those at the bottom of the food chain.” That got me thinking about how the recession may affect our collective health.

Fast food fits almost any budget. Between microwaves and cheap restaurant food, many people have never learned to cook, so, recession or not, they eat out. Lately eating out means inexpensive restaurants, fast food joints or deli take-outs. Places which serve large portions of calorie-dense food. If this pattern persists, we’ll see even more obesity and related diseases.

People might think they save money with fast food, but it costs more than a home-made chicken and bean burrito. The nation certainly doesn’t save money – fast food and associated obesity balloons medical care costs. (I really can’t call it ‘health’ care, since the chance for “health” has passed when an obese person becomes diabetic or has that heart attack.)

But we don’t *have* to eat fast food to save money. Here are some money saving ideas to improve your health:

- Save money on gas by walking or cycling.
- Get rid of the car and get a bus pass.
- Cook big pots of beans and healthy meals at home, instead of eating out. (See DrG’s MediSense Newsletter Vol 2-4, May 2007)
- Stop wasting money on junk food.
- Eat only when hungry and stop when not.
- Plant a garden.
- Play games with your family.
- Spend less on recreational drugs, like cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana . . .

How the recession could hurt your health:

- Stress wreaks havoc with our bodies.
- Eat calorie-dense, nutrient-poor food.
- Cancel the gym membership and forget that you can exercise without a machine and task-master (also known as personal trainer).
- Poor sleep.
- Suicide.

That last one is a bit extreme. Try walking off the depression, as opposed to driving into the sunset, which might lead to road rage and impact someone else’s health . . . and cost gas money.