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## **SEDENTARY DEATH SYNDROME IS WHAT RESEARCHERS NOW CALL AMERICA'S SECOND LARGEST THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH**

*Obesity has doubled, Type 2 diabetes has increased nine-fold, and heart disease remains the number one cause of death for Americans. Sedentary Death Syndrome, or "SeDS," is a growing list of health disorders that are exacerbated by lack of physical activity, causing premature disability and death. Sixty percent of all Americans are at risk, including children. SeDS is expected to add as much as \$3 trillion to healthcare costs over ten years, more than twice the tax cut passed by the US Senate.*

**Washington, DC** – (May 29, 2001) -- Chronic diseases have increased dramatically because of physical inactivity. In the United States obesity has doubled since 1980, Type 2 diabetes has increased nine-fold since 1958, and heart disease remains the number one cause of death.

Sedentary Death Syndrome, or "SeDS," is the term developed by more than 200 of the nation's leading physiologists to diagnose the growing epidemic of physical inactivity and its relationship to chronic, preventable diseases. It is estimated that 60 percent of all Americans are currently at risk for SeDS, a condition that leads to premature disability or death. Approximately 2.5 million Americans will die prematurely in the next ten years due to SeDS, a number greater than all alcohol, guns, motor vehicles, illicit drug use and sexual behavior related deaths combined. These researchers call SeDS the second largest threat to public health.

Frank Booth, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Physiology at the University of Missouri-Columbia, is spearheading the effort to get federal lawmakers, the medical community and the public to recognize SeDS as a serious health threat and increase funding for research that examines the link between physical inactivity and disease. Dr. Booth – who contributes to academic journals about the effects of sedentary lifestyles and their connections to preventable deaths and chronic diseases -- will address a gathering in Washington, DC on May 29, 2001.

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### ***Couch Potatoes: Boom Times and Busted Seams***

Almost two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). This stems in part from the fact that more than one-fourth of Americans are not physically active in their leisure time. The reasons for this inactivity vary.

In considering the population as a whole, physical activity decreases with age and is less common among women than men. Individuals with lower incomes and lesser education are less likely to be physically active. Consequently, older American women with declining incomes are at high risk for a sedentary lifestyle. They are most susceptible to what the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) calls an epidemic of obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

All Americans may incur a severe decline in their health due to consistent physical inactivity. Thirty-five known conditions are exacerbated by physical inactivity; they include: arthritis pain, arrhythmias, breast cancer, colon cancer, congestive heart failure, depression, gallstone disease, heart attack, hypertension, obesity, osteoporosis, peripheral vascular disease, respiratory problems, Type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea and stroke.

Too many Americans delight in their inactivity, labeling themselves as “couch potatoes.” They should know that they can decrease their risk of developing coronary heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes by 30 percent by adding only three hours of brisk walking per week. Jogging or more vigorous exercise decreases the risk of Type 2 diabetes by more than 50 percent. Regular exercise helps control weight, maintain bones and muscles, and increase strength and endurance.

### ***“Small Fries:” The Offspring of Couch Potatoes***

Children are more sedentary than ever. They are increasingly overweight and obese, now showing fatty streaks in their arteries and developing type 2 diabetes, a disease formerly restricted to adults. Between 1980-1994, obesity in American children increased 100 percent. Studies indicate that currently one in four children are obese. Not surprising, considering that the average American child spends 900 hours per year in school, but 1,023 hours watching television during the same period, according to the TV-Turnoff Network.

The problem is made worse by the fact that more than one-third of all young people between the ages of 12-21 do not regularly participate in vigorous physical activity. Daily participation in high school physical education dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 27 percent in 1997 according to the CDC. The Surgeon General of the United States recently observed that, “We are raising the most overweight youngsters in American history.”

### ***Risky Business for Seniors***

In FY 2000, approximately 35 million Americans, or 13 percent of the population, were 65 and older. This number is expected to double to 70 million (20 percent of the population) by 2030. Currently, more than one-third of the population age 50 and older is sedentary, according to the CDC, and of the people over 50 who have hip fractures, 24 percent die within a year.

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Between 35-50 percent of women age 70-80 have difficulty with tasks such as climbing a flight of stairs. Older adults who are physically active on a regular basis have better balance, cardiovascular health and joint mobility so they can retain their independent lifestyle longer.

### ***Bankrupting the Health Care System***

It is estimated that the cost of deaths related to inactivity conditions will add up to \$3 trillion more to health care costs during the next ten years, a figure more than double the tax cut now passed by the US Senate. The numbers of individuals in nursing homes will quadruple in the next 50 years, driven, in part, by the premature onset of adult diseases from sedentary lifestyles. “That bulge, coupled with the spiraling number of obese children will bankrupt the healthcare system,” Dr. Booth predicts.

### ***Solutions: Phase I***

“Such a financial catastrophe is avoidable,” says Dr. Booth, “starting out with small-step approaches to the problem and growing broader and more aggressive over time.” From a policy perspective he and his researcher colleagues are requesting that:

*CDC’s Funding for Physical Activity Programs Not Be Slashed, As Expected, to Fund A Tax Cut:* In order to balance the budget, Federal lawmakers have reduced the amount of funding to CDC for funding physical activity programs. Dr. Booth and his colleagues are calling for retention of the current level of funding and are hoping to secure an increase.

*Increase the Two Percent of the Annual Healthcare Budget Spent on Prevention:* Another approach is to double the current level (two percent) of annual health care expenditures from the \$1.3 trillion that is spent on healthcare annually and diverting the funds to teach sedentary prevention. Remarkably, the CDC estimates that if all physically inactive Americans become active, it would save \$77 billion in direct annual medical costs, and an estimated \$150 billion in direct and indirect medical costs based upon 1987 (*sic*) obesity and diabetes levels.

*Include SeDS Within NIH:* SeDS researchers are asking for creation of an NIH interagency committee to develop a plan for conducting and supporting research on SeDS in order to provide a partial solution to the lack of an NIH structure that can address physical inactivity/SeDS-based grant applications. Part of the plan would include establishment of one or more Centers of Excellence for research on SeDS, as well as the formation of a peer review group that will be composed of 30 percent SeDS researchers.

From a programmatic perspective, Booth and his colleagues are undertaking several steps which will:

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*Sell SeDS Awareness to the Video Generation - “Seuss Style”*: Childhood education about SeDS – much like childhood education about the dangers of smoking tobacco launched in the 1970s – is pivotal. To reach the first full-fledged “SeDS generation” about prevention, Dr. Booth and his colleagues are introducing a new character aimed at helping primary school children learn how to recognize and minimize risky behavior for SeDS.

A new four-color “mascot” “SeDS the Fat Cat,” a couch-loving, remote-control-hugging fat cat, surrounded by videotapes, computer games and other trappings of couch-potatodom will be introduced on May 29<sup>th</sup>. A year in the life of the fat cat, described in iambic pentameter ala’ Dr. Seuss storybooks, will be read by Washington-area grade school students.

*Restore Recess*: The researchers are calling on school systems to put recess back into school curriculums. By deleting recess from grades 1-6 sets, early and dangerous lifestyle patterns that promote SeDS can occur. Additionally, the group calls on schools to promote physical activities that involve all children, rather than those that utilize superior skills for just a few.

*Create A Walk of Shame and A Walk of Fame*: A hands-on display of items with the dubious distinction of being the biggest contributors to SeDS – televisions, videotapes, remote controls, computers, playing cards will be displayed at a news conference, along with items commonly found in a hall closet or garage whose use promotes physical activity. The items include a Frisbee, baseball mitt, soccer ball, basketball, jump rope, gardening gloves and a bicycle helmet.

*Issue An Annual “At-Risk Report Card”*: To begin building up the momentum for awareness, Dr. Booth has begun work on the “Annual At-Risk Report Card,” and will release his findings annually on the “State of America’s Health,” which will be compiled using several yardsticks. Among them are the 15 inactivity-related diseases, the average amount of time devoted to exercise, and the percentage of obesity found in children and adolescents.

### ***Conclusion***

According to Dr. Booth, “Physical inactivity, which can start during childhood, can lead to a wide range of diseases that coupled with poor diet, kill a quarter million people every year.” SeDS is a national health crisis that needs to be recognized by lawmakers, the medical community and the public. It can be remedied by promoting exercise through a variety of straight forward mechanisms, as well as by increasing funding for research that examines the underlying link between physical inactivity and disease.

***To schedule an interview with Dr. Booth, to obtain a copy of the “SeDS the Fat Cat” artwork or poem, dor photos from the walls of shame and fame, or a list of speakers attending the May 29 briefing on the Mall, contact Donna Krupa at 703.527.7357 (office), 703.967.2751 (cell) or at krupaSEDS@yahoo.com. Or log onto the website at www.ENDSEDS.org.***

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