



If you're fat, you can either jog or sue

On the heels of successful lawsuits against the tobacco industry, lawyers are licking their chops over the idea of suing the fast-food industry for its role in our national scourge of obesity.

Perhaps this is just step one. Obviously, fast foods are not the only factor causing obesity. Thousands of fattening foods fill our supermarkets and even health-food stores, not to mention our favorite plate-lunch vendors.

But why not think bigger and sue all the potentially guilty parties? After all, decreased physical activity may be a greater part of the problem than eating too many calories. Thinking along this line, there are a number of potentially guilty parties to sue.

For starters, consider the automobile industry. Making such comfortable and affordable cars has allowed people to avoid walking and cut their calorie expenditures greatly. This industry has contributed substantially to the obesity problem.

If a person spends 30 minutes a day sitting in a car instead of walking, the reduced calorie expenditure would be equivalent to a 15- to 20-pound gain of body fat each year! The automobile industry's lawyers better start thinking fast.

Perhaps the most innocent victims of the obesity epidemic are children and teenagers. Some very deep pockets are responsible for their weight problems. For example, it is clearly documented that children are sucked into spending many hours a day watching television. We could sue all the major networks, not to mention the companies that make televisions with remote controls.

Next in line is the computer industry. Kickball and hide-and-seek have been replaced with Web-surfing and e-mailing. Watch out Microsoft, Apple and Intel!

And then, what about video games? Nintendo and Sony could make good deep-pocket targets, too.

But why stick with suing private industries? Public school systems across the nation have been cutting way back on physical education classes. We estimate that the calories burned in high school PE classes are about 2,000 per week. That's enough to prevent more than eight pounds of fat gain per semester, or 15 to 20 pounds per school year!

A class-action suit against all state education systems that have reduced PE classes might not have the flashy appeal of going after McDonald's and General Motors, but there could be money in it.

We also know that genetic makeup can predispose people to obesity. In a country like the United States, where everything is someone else's fault, fat people might consider suing their parents for giving them faulty genes. After all, it's the American way of moving money around. By the time we are all finished, we will have sued everybody, including ourselves.

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