Fifty years ago "Cancer" used to be a stigma disease and we tended to avoid talking about it. Now, people don't hesitate to talk about cancer and they get help to avoid premature death. With the right treatment, most can live longer and healthier lives.

Today, "Obesity" is **the** stigma disease that most of us don't want to talk about. Obesity is certainly a spreading epidemic that most of us, especially those of us who are thin, think we know the answer and have the solution - **eat less and exercise more. End of discussion!** While that may in many, if not the majority of cases, be the beginning it does not come close to uncovering the ultimate cause.

Popular solutions, calories in versus calories out, do not resolve root causes. Popular solutions are symptomatic solutions and often wrong even after being proposed by "experts." Problems arise from their root causes. If a solution fails, it can only be because it did not resolve one or more of the root causes.

In 1977, after a couple of decades debating the "cause" of heart disease, it was declared that fat was the villain of both heart disease and obesity and the *Dietary Goals for the United States* was born. In 1980 it was presented to the American people; eat less fat and more carbohydrates. The government, with good intensions, now told us what we should be eating and the rest is history.

So what are the results of that edict? More than one-third (36.5%) of U.S. adults are obese. Obesity is a gateway disease and is linked to cancer, stroke, heart disease, diabetes and many other chronic conditions.

The question I've been wrestling with is whether obesity should be considered a disease or a symptom of how people interact with their increasingly unhealthy personal environments. According to the obesity-research community approximately 70% of the variance in our tendency to gain weight is determined by inheritance. But it is abundantly clear that our genetics is not the sole factor leading to our epidemic. This catastrophic rise has occurred since the 1980s and genes can't change that quickly. So the answer must lie in how those genes are reacting to the environment.

A good example to better understand this problem is alcoholism. We now accept alcoholism as a disease but if the potential alcoholic never took a drink then alcoholism as a disease would not occur. To complicate the problem alcoholism usually takes years before it becomes debilitating. Obesity is the same type of problem but much more complex. It is a multifactorial cultural condition with unique solutions for an increasing percentage of our population. The solution is to "Counter the Culture."