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## Obesity may push U.S. health costs above Europe: study

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Nearly twice as many U.S. adults are obese compared to European, a key factor leading Americans to suffer more often from cancer, diabetes and other chronic ailments, a study released on Tuesday found.

Treatment of these and other chronic diseases adds between \$100 billion and \$150 billion to the annual health care tab in the United States, according to the report comparing U.S. and European health published online in the journal Health Affairs.

The United States spends significantly more per capita than any European country on health care, about \$2 trillion annually, or 16 percent of the gross domestic product. While the big discrepancy has been linked to higher U.S. prices for medical treatment, the report said a sicker population may also be a factor.

"We expected to see differences between disease prevalence in the United States and Europe, but the extent of the differences is surprising," said Ken Thorpe, professor of public health at Emory University and a study co-author. "It is possible that we spend more on health care because we are, indeed, less healthy."

A key factor in many chronic illnesses is obesity and smoking. About 33 percent of Americans are obese, compared with 17 percent in 10 European countries reviewed. More than half of Americans are former or current smokers, compared with about 43 percent in the European sample.

While Americans appeared to be on the whole sicker than adults in other industrialized countries, the study said more aggressive preventive care could help explain the results for some illnesses.

For example, the study found 12.2 percent of Americans are diagnosed with cancer, more than twice that of Europe. But that is likely due in part to more screening here, the study said.

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