

# Exorcise the Demon Sloth

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Friday morning before I went out for a four-miler, I heard a segment on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" about the effects of climate and temperatures on countries' economies.

A Massachusetts Institute of Technology study suggests countries with higher temperatures have poor or slower economic growth. The researchers also found that for poor countries, an increase in annual average temperature by 1 degree centigrade corresponded to a 1.1 percent drop in per-capita gross domestic product.

"It's unclear exactly why temperature would have this effect," said the study. "It ... might ... be what you could call the 'sloth' theory — it's hard to work when it's hot out. Who wants to mow the lawn in August?"

Might this "sloth" theory also apply to obesity and physical fitness?

According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mississippi is the fattest state with a 32 percent obesity rate. The other nine are Alabama (30.3 percent), Tennessee (30.1 percent), Louisiana (29.8 percent), West Virginia (29.5 percent), Arkansas (28.7 percent), South Carolina (28.4 percent), Georgia (28.2 percent), Oklahoma (28.1 percent) and Texas (28.1 percent).

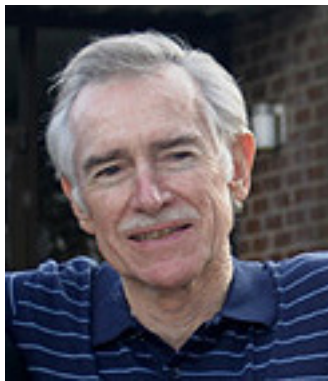
According to the annual survey and analysis by Men's Fitness, the fattest U.S. city is Miami, followed by Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Las Vegas, New York City, Houston, El Paso, Jacksonville, Fla., Charlotte, N.C., and Louisville-Jefferson, Ky. Fort Worth-Dallas is 14 in the survey. The only "high latitude" city is New York.

Men's Fitness ranks Salt Lake City the fittest city in America, followed by Colorado Springs, Minneapolis, Denver, Albuquerque, Portland, Ore., Honolulu, Seattle, Omaha, Neb., and Virginia Beach, Va. Austin ranks 17th.

The hidden variables in the data skew the statistics and include health club memberships,

long commutes to work, the number of sporting goods stores, donut outlets, home gyms, basketball and volleyball courts and golf courses, sports participation, fruit and vegetable consumption and time in front of the tube.

Statistics, however, suggest a "sloth syndrome" at work in the fattest cities. As in economics and per-capita domestic production, a higher temperature might contribute to obesity and a lack of physical fitness. Are we here on the Gulf Coast so near Houston, actually in a lower latitude, victims of sloth syndrome when we procrastinate in our physical fitness regimens? What about those who never get started on a physical fitness program and the obese youngsters we see surrounding us?



When I resolved to mow the lawn Tuesday, I gassed up the mower and pulled the cord reluctantly. I suffered from the sloth syndrome.

When I woke up this morning, I heard Demon Sloth whispering in my ear, "Why don't you lie abed this morning? You know it's steaming out there. Why push yourself. Stay cool."

After the first mile, Demon Sloth again whispered in my ear, "Hey, that's enough. You saw the humidity is 97 percent when you checked it on Weather Bug. You can make it up when it's cooler."

Sloth dogged my heels through mile 3 when I began to slow down and feel the heat.

"Stop and get into the cool of the air conditioning," Sloth said from under the shade of a tree as I pushed on to make mile 4.

When I went on to the porch to do my pushups, situps and weight exercises after my run, Sloth said, "You mean you're going to do more? Why punish yourself man? It's too hot."

I shut out Sloth's voice and finished.

Silence Demon Sloth's voice, lest he bewitch you by his hypnotic powers to keep you from heading out the door to exercise.

Fight with all your might to shut out the sweet, seductive sounds of Sloth's bewitching incantations even though you live in the hot Gulf Coast latitude.

**Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.**

