As much as we Texans like to brag about being at the top, being listed as one of the most obese states in America is not much of an accomplishment. We have gone from being the 16th fattest state in 1995 to being the 12th fattest state in 2010. We are going in the wrong direction, folks!

As the Texas Legislature struggled to put together a budget this year, our fatness made their job even harder. Approximately 20% of all our healthcare dollars is spent on illnesses and long-term diseases caused by obesity and smoking.

Just think what our legislators could have done if the Texas Medicaid budget could have been 20% less! That is us wasting our own money!

You can help yourself, your friends, and your family. Locate your height and weight on this chart. What is your classification?

What about your family members? What about your friends and co-workers? Where are they on the chart?

The further to the right of the Normal Weight column you are, the more serious your own personal health problems are going to be.

Just moving yourself one weight column to the left will make a big improvement in how you feel, how much more fun you are able to have, and how much money you can save in long-term healthcare costs.

Is there a full-length mirror in the house where you can see yourself every day?

It will help you as you work on this problem. In our house, we have a mirror in the hallway between the bedroom and the front door.
There is a reason Colorado came in as the least fat state in 2010.

Our Southern lifestyle is contributing to our weight problems. We don’t have to abandon what we love about being Texans. We just need to learn to be smarter about it.

Texas is hot, so we stay inside on the couch. We drive to go just a few blocks down the street, when we could have walked or ridden a bicycle -- because we would need another shower once we got there.

It is too hot to cook, so we go out to eat in air conditioned restaurants or grab fast food through the car window. Restaurants compete with good tasting, chef-style foods rather than low-fat, low calorie foods. And their portions are too big.

Ask for your vegetables to be steamed, and get your salad dressing on the side. Eat half of the entree and take the other half home for tomorrow’s lunch.

Electronic communications also has contributed to our weight problems. Ten years ago, we would walk down the hall to give someone a note or to discuss a situation with a co-worker. Today, we just text, Twitter, or send e-mail. The only movement involves our fingers, not our feet.

We can still be in air-conditioned comfort, but we also need to be moving our bodies. Your form of exercise needs to match your personality, or you won’t keep doing it. Set small goals at first and keep a log. Then next week, set your goal to be only a little bit greater.

If you are not an “exercise” person, pick up a pedometer (with a tether) at the drugstore. Put it in your pocket every morning and go about your day.

In the evening, check it to see how far you walked. You may need to do a little more walking before the evening is over.

Remember your grandmother’s saying “birds of a feather flock together”? If you are surrounded by others who also have weight problems, it is easier to ignore your own condition.

If your fellow overweight co-workers, friends, and family members won’t join you in this effort, seek out more active friends and co-workers and try to spend some of your time with them each week.

Forget “quick fixes” or “flavor-of-the-month” fad diets. By slowly making changes in a number of little habits in your daily life during the next six to twelve months, the improvements will become new, more permanent habits, and the pounds you get rid of won’t be as likely to come back.

(Dr. Thomas Parr, an orthopedic surgeon in Sugar Land, can be reached at 281-491-7111. Dr. Parr and his wife, Joannie, have been a team for well over 40 years. She has a BS Degree in Business and Finance and a Masters Degree in Federal Tax Law and has worked in the Medical accounting industry for more than 20 years. Visit www.tomparrmd.net for more information.)