

## **Crunch Hits Britons Where It Hurts**

*Crunch is now affecting peoples health...*

September 9, 2008 (FPRC) -- Most people will probably tell you that financial worries such as trying to find or pay back loans or the increasing costs of food and fuel give them a headache.

But it may be worse than that. According to new research from financial service provider Friends Provident along with UK charity the Blood Pressure Association, Britons' health is genuinely suffering as the credit crunch bites.

Nearly 29 million people, or almost two thirds of the population, feel more stressed, less fit and less healthy than they did three years ago, according to the findings. The Britain Under Pressure report found that the economic downturn means 37 per cent of people are worrying more, 19 per cent are losing sleep and 15 per cent are working longer hours.

In addition, seven per cent are drinking more and six per cent are smoking more as they try to cope with the financial pressures facing them. In addition, nine per cent expect to start drinking more in the next six months. And a majority of 80 per cent do not think they are doing enough to care for their health.

It gets worse. More than half of people (56 per cent) are buying cheaper food to try to reduce outgoings and 15 per cent have sacrificed spending on fruit and vegetables in an effort to cope financially. Almost a quarter (21 per cent) are using the gym less, with many specifically citing money as the reason.

Many are also becoming more reliant on less healthy ready-meals and takeaways, with 77 per cent regularly cooking them.

All in all, lifestyle changes and worry could cause a blood pressure 'ticking time bomb', according to the Blood Pressure Association. Chairman Professor Graham MacGregor warned that uncontrolled and undetected high blood pressure could lead to strokes, heart failure and heart attacks. These are the biggest killers in Britain.

He urged people to have a free blood pressure test.

According to Mark Jones, head of protection at Friends Provident, the credit crunch is having 'serious ramifications'. He noted that lifestyle changes for the worse, such as deteriorating diet and lack of exercise could affect blood pressure and health in the long term.

Even apart from problems linked directly to financial worries, 42 per cent of people never or barely ever monitor their salt intake while a third never or rarely eat the recommended five fruit and vegetable portions a day.

As such, people are being encouraged to take better care of their health. And one hobby with a reputation for being relaxing is gardening. Which is just as well, as gardening expert Joe Swift, presenter of BBC's Gardening World, says that maintaining a garden can increase the value of your

home.

His comments may well be of interest to people looking for ways to finance secured loans or improve the price of their house as they attempt to secure a loan for a property. Plants and summer houses are popular at the moment, while decking and paving can help to push up the value of a home.

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