

# Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter

October 2009

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first issue of the Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter!

Our goal is to provide information and resources for physicians, other health professionals and patients to promote longer, healthier lives for all. We will focus on addressing four key lifestyle behaviors and their health consequences:

- Poor diet
- Physical inactivity
- Tobacco use
- Excessive or risky use of alcohol



Although this publication is new, the AMA has been active in promoting healthy lifestyles and public health for many years, through these and other initiatives:

[The AMA Healthier Life Steps™ Program](#)

[Educating Physicians on Controversies and Challenges in Health \(EPoCH\) Program](#)

We're especially pleased that the AMA Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS) has chosen the AMA Healthier Life Steps™ program as its [national service project for 2009-2011](#). Medical students from AMA-MSS chapters nationwide will use the program to help improve the health of their communities.

Finally, be sure to refer to the AMA's "[Promoting Healthier Lifestyles](#)" page for news and updates on our many activities.

We welcome your e-mails on these or other issues related to healthy lifestyles at [Healthier.LifeSteps@ama-assn.org](mailto:Healthier.LifeSteps@ama-assn.org).

Best Regards,  
Richard Yoast, Director, Prevention and Healthy Lifestyles

PS: This e-Letter is distributed at no cost each month. Physicians: Help support this publication. Are you a member of the American Medical Association? If so, thank you! If not, please [join or renew your membership](#) now.

## Table of contents

1. [Physical activity and exercise: Fitness a key factor in longer lives](#)
2. [Diet and nutrition: Making healthy food choices \\* Spartan diet, longer life? \\* Nobody's eating their vegetables \\* Hospitals' planet-healthy menus \\* Cut the corn \(syrup\) \\* High-salt diets and high blood pressure](#)
3. [Obesity and overweight: Some physicians avoid talking about weighty problem \\* South struggles with obesity crisis \\*](#)

[Colorado keeping obesity at bay \\* YMCA helping those with pre-diabetes](#)

[4. Smoking cessation and prevention: Smoking bans prevent heart attacks, save lives \\* Concerns about regulation of tobacco](#)

[\\* FDA extinguishes flavored cigarettes](#)

[5. Reducing alcohol problems through prevention: Drunk driving difficult to stamp out](#)

[6. Mental health promotion, stress reduction: Physicians need to play a more active role in patients' social/mental health](#)

[7. Cost effectiveness/cost benefits related to prevention: Does prevention save money? \\* Salt away the savings](#)

## 1. Physical activity and exercise: Fitness a key factor in longer lives

Better fitness = better odds for a longer life: The least-fit segment of the population has twice the mortality risk of even those who are just a bit more in shape, according to a study published in the official journal of the [American College of Sports Medicine](#).

The study's results lend credence to [Exercise is Medicine](#), a multi-organizational effort to make physical activity a standard part of the health care paradigm.

The study was highlighted in the Oct. 6 issue of [Forbes](#).

Learn more about physical activity and exercise. . .

Check out "[Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#)"

## 2. Diet and nutrition: Making healthy food choices \* Spartan diet, longer life? \* Nobody's eating their vegetables \* Hospitals' planet-healthy menus \* Cut the corn (syrup) \* High-salt diets and high blood pressure

When it comes to healthy food choices, not sure who to believe any more? Writing in the [New York Times](#) (Oct. 6), columnist Michael Pollan suggests we turn to the received wisdom of our elders and the "rules of thumb about eating that have been passed down in our families or plucked from the cultural conversation."

Here's a drastic food choice: Reduce your calorie consumption by a quarter. The NIH-funded Calerie project is "investigating how (and if) a spartan diet affects the aging process and its associated diseases" ([New York Times](#), Oct. 11).

Only 14% of adults consume the recommended number of servings of fruit and vegetables a day, according to [new report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Also covering the story was [USA Today](#) (Sept. 29), which noted that three of the bottom states in fruit/vegetable consumption are in the Southeast.

Good for the planet, good for people: The "[Balanced Menus Challenge](#)," from Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), is leading a growing number of health care institutions nationwide to reduce their meat offerings in patient meals and hospital cafeterias.

Calls for a "soft drink tax" to reduce the health effects of high fructose corn syrup are being countered by such entities as the Center for Consumer Freedom, "a lobbying group financed by the food and beverage industry," which sidesteps the health issue and targets what it calls government influence in personal choices ([New York Times](#), Oct. 8).

Sugar or corn syrup? Too much of either are equally harmful ([Los Angeles Times](#), Sept. 30).

America's "craving for high-salt foods" is a leading factor in the increase in undetected or poorly controlled hypertension ([New York Times](#), Sept. 21).

Learn more about diet and nutrition. . .

Check out the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and the related [consumer-friendly resources](#).

### **3. Obesity and overweight: Some physicians avoid talking about weighty problem \* South struggles with obesity crisis \* Colorado keeping obesity at bay \* YMCA helping those with pre-diabetes**

Many clinicians "don't properly evaluate patients to determine if they're overweight, routinely failing to measure body-mass index"; if they "do screen for obesity, many don't discuss the importance of weight loss" ([Los Angeles Times](#), Oct. 12).

To help redress this gap, the STOP Obesity Alliance is developing guidelines for treatment of overweight and obese patients ([USA Today](#), Oct. 6).

One physician who hasn't been shy about speaking out on obesity is Toby Cosgrove, MD, CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, who told the New York Times earlier this year "that he would not hire obese people if it was legal" ([HealthLeaders Media](#), Sept. 21).

The problem of obesity is especially severe in the South, and African Americans in this region are the group with the highest obesity rates. The selection of Regina Benjamin, MD, of Louisiana as US Surgeon General may help call attention to this concern ([USA Today](#), Sept. 30).

Meanwhile, an [initiative in Colorado](#) (which holds the title of "leanest state in America") is working to keep its percentage of overweight and obese citizens low through consumer education and policy and environmental changes.

A 16-week program by the YMCA is helping patients with pre-diabetes take control and avoid developing that disease and its complications ([Marketwatch](#), Oct. 6).

A health promotion program in Australia proved successful in engaging early childhood services and primary schools and helping reduce the risk of overweight and obesity ([BMC Public Health](#), Sept. 18).

Learn more about obesity and overweight. . .

Check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [resources on overweight and obesity](#).

### **4. Smoking cessation and prevention: Smoking bans prevent heart attacks, save lives \* Concerns about regulation of tobacco \* FDA extinguishes flavored cigarettes**

"Community smoking bans have an immediate and dramatic effect on reducing heart attacks," reported the Sept. 21 [USA Today](#), with two separate studies recording a 17 percent decline within a year after a ban is implemented.

The two studies were published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology and Circulation, respectively.

<http://content.onlinejacc.org/cgi/content/abstract/54/14/1249> (abstract)

<http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/120/14/1373> (abstract)

The studies received significant media coverage, including:

"U.S. Report Links Smoking Bans and Heart Health," [New York Times](#)

"Smoking Bans Effective in Cutting Heart-Disease Risk, Study Says," [Wall Street Journal](#)

Although the FDA is now empowered to regulate tobacco, "advocates express concern that the bill does not go far enough and harbor suspicions about the lobbying of Philip Morris, an unlikely supporter in Congress" ([JAMA](#), Oct. 7).

The AMA has applauded the [FDA's](#) recent move to ban flavored cigarettes.

Learn more about smoking cessation and prevention. . .

Check out the national guidelines for smoking cessation, "[Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update](#)"

## 5. Reducing alcohol problems through prevention: Heavy drinking in colleges a continuing problem

A recent study looking at colleges with high levels of drinking in 1993 and how drinking levels and related harms might have changed between 1993 and 2005 found that "heavy drinking and associated problems continue unabated, with few exceptions, at colleges that are most in need of intervention" ([Journal of Studies on Alcohol](#), September).

Drunk driving continues to exact a steep physical and emotional toll on the nation -- and the financial costs are significant as well ([Time Wellness blog](#), Oct. 8).

The referenced study appeared in the October [Annals of Emergency Medicine](#) (abstract).

Learn more about reducing alcohol problems through prevention. . .

Check out the CDC's Alcohol and Public Health [Web site](#).

For current alcohol research, news, and reports, check out [Join Together](#), from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University

## 6. Mental health promotion, stress reduction: Physicians need to play a more active role in patients' social/mental health

In "[Disruption and Innovation in Health Care](#)" in the Oct. 7 *JAMA*, Robert H. Brook, MD, ScD, writes: "Physicians do not spend sufficient time examining the social and mental health of patients, and do not view as their responsibility helping patients become better integrated into the community or developing positive mental health attributes that could make patients happier and, potentially, healthier."

## 7. Cost effectiveness/cost benefits related to prevention: Does prevention save money? \* Salt away the savings

Prevention is often cited as the silver bullet to help the U.S. reduce its health care expenditures, but economists and policy analysts who study the issue say there's little evidence to support the claim -- in fact, prevention can be costly ([Bloomberg News](#), Oct. 7).

Salt away the savings: Reducing salt consumption could reduce hypertension cases by 11 million and save \$18 billion annually in health spending, according to a study in the [American Journal of Health Promotion](#).

The study is "one of the first to estimate the economic benefits of reducing salt consumption" ([New York Times](#), Sept. 22).

If so, thank you! If not, please [join or renew your membership](#) now.

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### **About us**

The Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter provides information and resources for physicians and other health professionals as well as patients to promote longer, healthier lives for all.

This e-Letter focuses on addressing four key lifestyle behaviors – poor diet, physical inactivity, tobacco use, and excessive or risky use of alcohol – and their health consequence

### **Give us your story ideas and feedback**

Send your comments to [Healthier.LifeSteps@ama-assn.org](mailto:Healthier.LifeSteps@ama-assn.org), American Medical Association, (312) 464-4202

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