



## Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter

November 2009

Dear Reader,

This month we have a number of items to share regarding our Healthy Lifestyles activities. At the AMA's interim meeting in Houston earlier this month, AMA medical student members hosted a health fair for the Houston community, with 35 student volunteers providing basic health screenings, including blood pressure and BMI checks, for about 100 adults.

The event was part of the [AMA Medical Student Section's](#) national service project, the AMA Healthier Life Steps™ Program.



The AMA is also pleased to announce the release of [Promoting Preventive Services for Adults 50-64: Community and Clinical Partnerships](#), which details preventive care indicators state-by-state.

In October, the AMA joined the national Coordinating Committee for developing a [National Physical Activity Plan](#) to implement the national Guidelines for Physical Activity.

This planning group and its numerous work groups are developing strategies for implementation by spring 2010 in health care, business and industry, education, transportation, and other sectors. In addition, the AMA is producing a new online education video for physicians and staff to explain the Guidelines and how to help patients meet the guidelines' goals.

Looking ahead, your input is needed (by December 31) on the proposed [Healthy People 2020](#) objectives, which encompass tobacco, alcohol/substance abuse, nutrition and weight, and physical activity and fitness.

Finally, looking beyond our national public health challenges, a [new report](#) from the World Health Organization finds that alcohol use and high blood pressure are two of the five key issues that should be addressed to increase global life expectancy.

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.

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## 1. Physical activity and exercise

- **PE: Particularly Essential.** Physical education classes, as well as after-school sports/fitness program and active transport to and from school, are all important ways to help improve student health in low-income communities (*Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, November).
- **Journal highlights National Physical Activity Plan.** The *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* has issued a special supplement on the US National Physical Activity Plan, with white papers from each of the eight societal sectors addressed by the plan as well as a review of national physical activity plans from around the world.

Learn more about physical activity and exercise . . . Check out [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#)

## 2. Diet and nutrition

- **IOM to schools: Put money where your mouth is.** Although it could cost more, the nation's schools should invest in children's health by changing menus to limit sodium and calories and encouraging more consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, says the [Institute of Medicine](#). Also see *USA Today* (Oct. 20).
- **Low carbs = high anxiety?** A new study suggests that people on high-carb, low-fat diets are less angry and depressed than those on low-carb, high-fat diets (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, Nov. 9). *HealthDay* (Nov. 9) and *Bloomberg News* (Nov. 10) covered the study.
- **Assault on sugar continues, but some demur.** The recent publication of the American Heart Association's sugar recommendations in *Circulation*, calling for reduced consumption of soft drinks and other sweetened products, have "stirred up a debate" (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 4). The Oct. 28 *JAMA* also reported on the recommendations.

The pros and cons of funding health system reform through a soft drink tax are being debated by editorial writers nationwide (*American Medical News*, Oct. 12).

- **Sugar-free non-fat chocolate milk may reduce inflammation:** For patients at high risk of cardiovascular disease, drinking skim milk with flavonoid-rich, defatted, and sugar-free cocoa "may reduce inflammation, potentially slowing or preventing development of atherosclerosis," suggests a recent study (*New York Times*, Nov. 9). The study appears in the November issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Learn more about diet and nutrition . . . Check out the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and the related [consumer-](#)

[friendly resources.](#)

### 3. Obesity and overweight

- **Gut instinct:** A new study in mice suggests that high-fat, high-sugar diets alter one's intestinal microbiota and microbiome, increasing the chances of weight gain (*Science Translational Medicine*, November). The *Los Angeles Times* (Nov. 12) reported on the study.
- **Healthy communities decrease incidence of diabetes.** A study found a 38 percent lower incidence of type 2 diabetes in neighborhoods that are conducive to physical activity and healthy eating (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, Oct. 12).

More walkable communities, with better sidewalks and bicycle paths, and community gardens and farmers' markets, are promising environmental interventions, notes a [related editorial](#) in the same issue.

The study was covered in the *Los Angeles Times* and *MedPage Today* (Oct. 12).

Nationwide, diabetes cases are rising rapidly, according to a new Gallup survey, with 11.3 percent of the adult population afflicted (*WebMD*, Oct. 28).

November is National Diabetes Awareness Month. The [National Diabetes Education Program](#) (NDEP) offers a wide array of information and resources on diabetes prevention and management.

- **Chew your way to weight loss?** Research (sponsored by the Wrigley Science Institute) suggests "that chewing gum may help reduce cravings, particularly for sweet snacks, and spur people to cut their daily intake by about 50 calories" (*Washington Post*, Nov. 11).
- **Study: Some physicians have "little respect" for obese patients.** A study in the November *Journal of General Internal Medicine* found that "as patients had higher BMI, physicians reported lower respect for them." The *Los Angeles Times* (Oct. 22) and *Time* (Oct. 22) reported on the study.
- **Link between obesity and childhood neglect, abuse.** A study in *Obesity* suggests a correlation between having been abused or neglected as a child and obesity (*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 15).
- **Dirty air takes greater toll on obese:** A new study found that air pollution causes significant increases in blood pressure among obese individuals (*HealthDay* Oct. 15). The research was published online in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (Oct. 16).
- **The fat pill?** The *New York Times* (Oct. 17) reports that three companies are applying for regulatory approval of anti-obesity drugs. A related article in the *Times* examines concerns with the proposed drugs and balancing effectiveness with safety.
- **To halt obesity, get them while they're young:** Child-care providers should take steps to incorporate healthy meals and physical activity into their programs (*USA Today*, Oct. 13). Notes one expert, "Elementary school is too late."
- **Obesity may cause more than 100,000 new cases of cancer annually.** A new analysis from the American Institute for Cancer Research estimated 100,500 new cases of cancer are caused by obesity every year, including cancers of the breast, kidney, colon, pancreas, esophagus, and gallbladder (*USA Today*, Nov. 5).

**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

- **A blip, or a trend?** New data from the CDC show that cigarette smoking rose slightly for the first time in almost 15 years (*Associated Press*, Nov. 13).

- **Physicians not counseling cancer survivors about quitting tobacco:** More than a quarter of cancer survivors who smoke "didn't receive any advice about quitting from their healthcare provider," according to a study in the [Journal of General Internal Medicine](#) (November). "Healthcare providers need to take advantage of this teachable moment," noted the study's lead author in an article in the [Los Angeles Times](#) (Oct. 20).
- **Misconceptions, marketing keep urban poor from quitting.** Getting the last 20 percent of Americans who smoke to quit will be difficult, in light of misconceptions about tobacco and intensive marketing by tobacco companies ([HealthDay](#) (Oct. 16).
- **Which smoking cessation therapies are best?** A study in the November [Archives of General Psychiatry](#) finds a nicotine patch combined with nicotine lozenges is the most effective. The study was covered by the [Los Angeles Times](#) and [HealthDay](#) (Nov. 2).

For teen smokers, telephone counseling may be the way to go, according to studies published in the [Journal of the National Cancer Institute](#) (WebMD, Oct. 12).

- **Shots for smokers:** A promising smoking-cessation vaccine is entering Phase III trials ([USA Today](#), Nov. 16).
- **Casual smokers need treatment too.** In addition to treating the prototypical two-packs-a-day smoker, clinicians "need to improve their screening and identification of nondaily and social smokers" and tailor cessation strategies that work for this specific population, notes the authors of a commentary in the Oct. 26 [Archives of Internal Medicine](#). Also see the Oct. 26 [Los Angeles Times](#) ("[Occasional smoking is increasing and shouldn't get a pass](#)").
- **Many sports fans are smokers:** A [new survey](#) finds that 63 percent of sports fans surveyed are current or former smokers and 76 percent of them have smoked while watching or attending sporting events.
- **Smoking bans go to heart of public health:** A new [Institute of Medicine report](#) concludes that "secondhand-smoke exposure increases the risk of coronary heart disease and heart attacks and that smoking bans reduce this risk."

**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

- **Alcohol, caffeine dangerous duo:** In light of growing concerns about beverages that combine alcohol and caffeine, the FDA has sent a letter to 30 manufacturers of these drinks ([MedPage Today](#), Nov. 13).

One study found that the drinks produce "a false sense of sobriety that predisposes to risk-taking, accidents, and injury" ([MedPage Today](#), Nov. 7, 2007).

The [FDA Web site](#) includes more information on its investigation.

Also see "[Alcohol, Energy Drinks, and Youth: A Dangerous Mix](#)," a report of the Marin Institute.

The [AMA is on record in calling for a ban](#) on beverages that combine alcohol and caffeine.

- **Rethinking Drinking helps patients assess risks of alcohol:** A new Web site from the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\)](#), Rethinking Drinking, offers resources, information, and drinking cost calculators for individuals who may be unaware that their drinking habits are putting them at risk for alcohol-related problems.

Also from the NIAAA is Spectrum, an [online e-zine](#) published three times a year that offers accessible and relevant information on NIAAA and the alcohol research field for a wide range of audiences.

- **Web portal offers resources for preventing underage drinking.** Check out [StopAlcoholAbuse.Gov](#), a comprehensive portal of federal resources related to prevention of underage drinking, with information for parents, educators, public health officials, and others.

- **Blood alcohol content calculator available online:** The [University of Oklahoma Police Department's Web site](#) offers an online blood alcohol content calculator as well as alcohol impairment charts and tips for preventing drinking and driving.
- **Incorporating alcohol pharmacotherapies into medical practice:** The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (PDF) offers best practices for using medications to treat alcohol use disorders.

**Learn more about reducing alcohol problems through prevention . . .** Check out the CDC's Alcohol and Public Health [Web site](#). Also, 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

- **All adults should be screened for depression:** The American College of Preventive Medicine is calling on primary care physicians to play a key role in combating undertreatment of depression ([American Medical News](#), Oct. 26).
- **Green spaces soothe the savage breast:** A new study finds that people living near green spaces are less likely to experience anxiety disorders and depression ([Bloomberg News](#), Oct. 15).
- **Fish oil does not aid depression:** A new study finds that "fish oil supplements do not ease depression in individuals who suffer from both depression and coronary heart disease" ([HealthDay](#), Oct. 20). The study was published in the Oct. 21 [JAMA](#).
- **Americans' understanding of depression lacking.** Seventy-one percent of the public said they are not familiar with depression, but 68 percent or more know specific consequences that can come from not receiving treatment -- including suicide, according to a [new survey](#) by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

## 7. Cost effectiveness/cost benefits related to prevention

- **Mammography recommendations change:** Annual breast cancer screenings are not recommended until age 50, not 40, according to a new report from the US Preventive Services Task Force ([Annals of Internal Medicine](#)). The report also recommends against teaching breast self-examination.

The recommendations, which are "aimed at reducing the potential harm from overscreening," are the subject of intense debate among physicians and patients ([New York Times](#), Nov. 17).

- **Value of screenings questioned:** Do mammograms and PSA blood tests make a difference? The American Cancer Society recently stated that the "advantages of screening for some cancers have been overstated" ([New York Times](#), Oct. 21).

One editorial writer wonders, however, what if yours is the life that is saved ([Los Angeles Times](#), Oct. 25).

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### Interested in more news?

In addition to the *Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter*, the AMA also offers three other free monthly e-Letters that may be of interest:

The [Ending Disparities e-Letter](#) shares news, information, and updates related to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health care.

The [Health Care Careers e-Letter](#) covers educational trends and career-related issues in the health professions.

The [GME \(graduate medical education\) e-Letter](#) covers issues affecting GME -- everything from resident work hours and health workforce concerns to updates on accreditation activities and development of new subspecialties.

## Are you a member of the American Medical Association (AMA)?

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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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