

Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter

December 2009

Dear Reader,

Looking ahead to next year, the AMA's [five-point strategic plan for 2010](#) prominently features prevention and wellness to help reduce health care costs and improve quality of life.

This year, the AMA has made significant strides towards ensuring a healthier nation. Some recent examples:

- AMA staff Suzen Moeller, PhD, participated in the National Public Health Stakeholder Meeting on Sodium Reduction, hosted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.
- Former Surgeon General David Satcher, MD, came to Chicago to star in a [videotape](#) promoting the AMA Healthier Lifestyles Toolkit™ and asking doctors to take better care of their own health.
- The Building a Healthier Chicago (BHC) project, of which AMA is a founding member, hosted a meeting of more than 100 stakeholder organizations. With the Chicago Department of Public Health in the lead, the AMA and other BHC organizations are participating in a collaborative grant proposal in response to a CDC request, "Communities Putting Prevention to Work."



We welcome your e-mails on these or other issues related to healthy lifestyles at 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

- **Keep up the pace:** A new study in the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#) recommends using pedometers to measure a healthy benchmark: 3000 steps in 30 minutes, five days a week.
- **Virtually exercising:** Anecdotal evidence indicates that video games like "Dance Dance Revolution" may have health benefits; a new study will seek a definitive answer ([American Medical News](#), Dec. 4).
- **Exercise now, sleep later:** A new study found that "every hour of sedentary activity during the day resulted in an additional three minutes in the time it took to fall asleep at night" ([New York Times](#), Dec. 1).
- **The exercise-hunger connection:** Exercise makes you hungrier but also makes you more satiated when you eat, according to a recent study ([Reuters Health](#), Nov. 25). The study was published in the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#).

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

2. Diet and nutrition

- **Health care must lead the way to better nutrition:** With four of the six leading causes of death linked to Americans' diets, the health care sector should play a key role in supporting healthier food environments, according to the Kaiser Permanente Institute for Health Policy. To learn more, download "[Sustainable Food Procurement and Agriculture Policy](#)" and "[A Health Sector Guide to Food System and Agricultural Policy](#)".

[AMA policy](#), in fact, calls for medical schools, hospitals, and other health care facilities to "support and model a healthy and ecologically sustainable food system."
- **Save the antibiotics!** To help preserve the effectiveness of medically important antibiotics used in treating human and animal diseases, the AMA supports H.R. 1549 and S. 619, the "Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2009." Help support this legislation by signing an [online petition](#) sponsored by Health Care Without Harm.
- **Vitamin D essential for heart health?** New research suggests that vitamin D may play a key role in ensuring cardiovascular health ([New York Times Well Blog](#), Nov. 16). For more on Vitamin D, see the Dec. 2009 [Harvard Heart Letter](#).
- **Learn more about diet and nutrition.** . . . Check out the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and the related [consumer-friendly resources](#).

3. Obesity and overweight

- **Obesity costs on steep upward slope:** Along with some good news (smoking, infectious disease, violent crime are down), a report ranking states' health status finds obesity (and "a tsunami of chronic preventable disease") rising rapidly ([American Medical News](#), Nov. 30). The data were published in "[America's Health Rankings](#)."

In an interview in the Nov. 17 [New York Times](#), the report's author notes that "bending the cost curve" in health care is

impossible without addressing obesity and its effects.

- **Smoking less, weighing more:** As noted above, tobacco use is down, but obesity continues to climb and may cancel out the nation's life expectancy gains from reduced smoking, according to a recent study. In fact, "If past trends continue, nearly half of adults in the U.S. will meet the World Health Organization criteria for obesity by 2020" ([WebMD](#), Dec. 2).
- **The obese who think they're not:** A recent study found that eight percent of obese patients thought their current weight was healthy. "Patients with inaccurate body size perceptions tended to be younger," and "blacks and Hispanics were more likely than whites to believe their body size was healthy" ([Time Wellness Blog](#), Nov. 18).
- **Head Start program takes on childhood obesity:** In the past, Head Start focused on aiding children who were undernourished. Today, the focus has shifted to the approximately 30 percent of kids in Head Start who are overweight or obese ([USA Today](#), Dec. 7).

Other nationwide programs, such as EmpowerME, are working to address the root causes of obesity in children and teens ([Washington Post](#), Nov. 18).

- **The flip side:** Obesity is no doubt a pressing nationwide problem, but [millions of Americans](#) are going hungry as well.
- **Changing behaviors to prevent diabetes:** A new online tool from the [National Diabetes Education Program](#) supports behavior change in people with diabetes or at risk for diabetes and their families. The AMA is a partner organization of the NDEP.
- **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

- **CDC director: [Stall in smoking decline troublesome](#).** With data showing the smoking rate virtually unchanged since 2004, more drastic measures, such as public smoking bans and higher federal tobacco taxes, may be needed.
- **Psychiatric patients should receive help to quit smoking:** A recent review calls for including smoking cessation services when treating patients with psychiatric and substance use disorders "to not only mitigate the health issues of tobacco but to improve mental health treatment outcomes" ([Psychiatric Times](#), Nov. 7).
- **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

- **Drink tonight, work it off tomorrow?** A survey of drinkers in England found that 28 percent "exercise to stave off the effects of over-indulging" ([UK Press Association](#), Nov. 25).

A Web site from the [UK's National Health Service](#) offers advice on the relationship between alcohol consumption and fitness as well as an [alcohol unit calculator](#) and other links.

- **Kudzu may cut urge to drink:** An ingredient derived from kudzu (aka "the vine that ate the South," for its prodigious growth) may be useful in helping treat alcoholism ([USA Today](#), Nov. 17).
- **The two types of alcohol disorders:** "The largest and most comprehensive look at alcohol use in America" found that only one percent of those surveyed have a severe, recurring addiction, versus those with a "time-limited form in which people drink heavily for a period, but then cut down and recover" ([Los Angeles Times](#), Nov. 16).
- **Alcohol may lower risk of heart disease in men:** A study in the journal *Heart* suggests that alcohol may "lower the risk of heart illness in men. And the more they drink, the lower their risk" ([Bloomberg News](#), Nov. 19).

- **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

- **Depression death risk comparable to smoking:** A study in the [British Journal of Psychiatry](#) found that "depression as a risk factor for mortality was comparable in strength to smoking." The study was covered by [HealthDay](#) (Nov. 23).
- **Early adversity and its long-term effects:** The [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACE\) Study](#) is examining the link between childhood physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and health and behavioral outcomes later in life.
- **Psychological distress and the prevention gap:** Women with psychological distress are more likely than non-distressed women to report delays in accessing routine care services and preventive screenings ([Journal of Primary Prevention](#), September).
- **AHRQ updates depression recommendations:** The recommendations for Screening for Depression in Adults from the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#) have been updated.

7. Cost effectiveness/cost benefits related to prevention

- **Wellness programs paying off:** Some companies, like Safeway and IBM, have done their part to bend the curve in health care costs through wellness and prevention programs and payroll credits for healthy behaviors ([New York Times](#), Nov. 29).

These types of programs don't have to cost a lot to be effective, according to research in the *American Journal of Cardiology* ([Hearing Review](#), Dec. 1).

- **Diabetes costs to triple within 25 years:** According to a new study, "diabetes cases will nearly double in the US in the next 25 years and the cost of treating the disease will almost triple" ([Chicago Tribune](#), Nov. 27).

8. More news of note

- **Age like an Egyptian:** CT scans of mummies reveal evidence of heart disease, centuries before modern fast food and sedentary lifestyles ([USA Today](#), Nov. 18).
- **Wasted food, wasted planet:** The surfeit of cheap, readily available food has led to increased obesity, and increased waste, with 40 percent of total food supply getting tossed. This also has environmental and climate change implications, [according to researchers](#), who published their findings in [PLoS ONE](#).
- **Sick planet, sick people:** Climate change's effects may not be only global but individual as well. New research finds that "kidney stones, malaria, Lyme disease, depression and respiratory illness all may increase with global warming" ([Bloomberg News](#), Nov. 20).
- **Slash carbon footprint, save lives:** Reducing carbon dioxide emissions "could save millions of lives, mostly by reducing preventable deaths from heart and lung diseases," according to five studies published in the [Lancet](#) (AP, Nov. 26).

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.

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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, American Medical Association, (312) 464-4202

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