

# Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter

February 2010

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### **Intro: Closing the gaps in public health**

Dear Reader,

The January 25 issue of the AMA's *Archives of Internal Medicine* features several articles of interest to the public health community on exercise and diet.

The lead editorial in this issue, "Tackling Obesity: Is Primary Care Up to the Challenge?," examines various data points that suggest "an extensive gap between recommended obesity care and current physician practice."

Helping to close that gap is one of the overarching goals of this newsletter and of the AMA's Prevention and Healthy Lifestyles department, as well as of the AMA's Strategic Issue Team on Prevention and Wellness.

"Public" health, of course, connotes a wider involvement than medical doctors alone. Academics and teachers, policy makers, employers, urban planners, members of the faith community, students, community leaders -- all are needed to help improve the nation's health in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual terms.

Towards that end, be sure to check out the 2nd Annual Conference on Improving Health and Transforming Communities, "Eat Well, Live Well, Move More," presented by [Building a Healthier Chicago](#), to be held April 7-8 in Chicago.

As always, we welcome your comments on these and related issues at [Healthier.LifeSteps@ama-assn.org](mailto:Healthier.LifeSteps@ama-assn.org). Reader feedback and items of significant interest will be shared in future issues.

Best Regards,  
The AMA Prevention and Healthy Lifestyles Team

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

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## 1. Physical activity and exercise

- Strength training helps stave off cognitive decline: A new study finds that "older women who did an hour or two of strength training exercises each week had improved cognitive function a year later" ([New York Times](#), Jan. 26).
- Don't sit, or die? Even those who exercise regularly are at higher risk of obesity, heart attacks, or death if they spend their days sitting for prolonged periods ([AP](#), Jan. 20).
- Learn how to educate patients about physical activity: A [new online program by the AMA](#) introduces physicians to national recommendations for physical activity and explains how doctors can help patients of all ages become more physically active.

**Learn more about physical activity and exercise. . .**

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

## 2. Diet and nutrition

- Fast food chains playing fast and loose with dietary facts: Besides convenience and taste, many fast food chains are promoting their low-fat offerings as healthy options for dieters ([New York Times](#), Jan. 28).
- Fish oil offers brain benefits: A new study suggests that fish oil pills may help prevent schizophrenia in young people who have signs of mental illness ([Web MD](#), Feb. 1).
- Cut salt, save lives: "If everyone consumed half a teaspoon less salt per day, there would be between 54,000 and 99,000 fewer heart attacks each year and between 44,000 and 92,000 fewer deaths," reports the [New York Times](#) (Jan. 21) in coverage of a *NEJM* study

**Learn more about diet and nutrition. . .**

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

## 3. Obesity and overweight

- First Lady to take on childhood obesity: Calling the condition "an epidemic and one of the greatest threats to America's

health and economy," Michelle Obama announced a major initiative to reduce obesity in children ([USA Today](#), Jan. 20). The [AMA](#) is pleased to join the First Lady's fight against childhood obesity.

- "Normal weight obesity" new health threat? Many Americans not classified as overweight have a high percentage of body fat, which can lead to health risks, report researchers at the Mayo Clinic ([Wall Street Journal](#), Jan. 26).
- "Crack down" on junk food, beverages in schools: A recent editorial argues that Massachusetts' lawmakers should approve a bill that would replace junk food and soda sold in schools with healthy offerings ([Boston Globe](#), Jan. 28).
- For severely obese teens, surgery may trump lifestyle changes: A study published in the Feb. 10 [JAMA](#) found that gastric banding surgery is more effective than diet and exercise alone for helping adolescents with severe obesity to lose weight and keep it off. The study was covered in the Feb. 10 [Los Angeles Times](#).

#### Learn more about obesity and overweight. . .

- Check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [resources on overweight and obesity](#)
- Also see the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

### 4. Smoking cessation and prevention

- Tobacco taxes can't exist in a vacuum: Raising taxes on tobacco is an effective tool in reducing smoking, but public health messages are also vitally important to complement the "sin tax" approach ([JAMA](#), Jan. 27).
- To help smokers quit, accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative: New research suggests that smokers are twice as likely to kick the habit "when they got positive messages rather than negative ones" ([MedPage Today](#), Jan. 8).

#### Learn more about smoking cessation and prevention. . .

- Check out the US Public Health Service national guidelines for smoking cessation, "[Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update](#)"
- As part of its [Secondhand Smoke Initiative](#), the AMA has developed an online training module to assist physicians in counseling parents about the health risks associated with secondhand smoke exposure.

### 5. Reducing alcohol problems through prevention

- Newborns of mothers who drank heavily during pregnancy have higher pain threshold: A study found that newborns whose mothers drank heavily during pregnancy "had a more muted reaction to being lanced in the heel for blood collection, a standard but painful hospital procedure" ([HealthDay News](#), Jan. 27).

#### 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](#), a project of the Boston University School of Public Health

### 6. Mental health promotion, stress reduction

- "As the twig is bent, the tree inclines": Two articles in the February [Archives of General Psychiatry](#) offer data that confirm "the links between childhood trauma and both childhood and adult mental health problems."

- Web use nets depression? A study to be published in the journal *Psychopathology* found an association between compulsive Internet use and higher rates of moderate to severe depression ([Time](#), Feb. 2)
- Psychiatric drugs a factor in obesity epidemic? Writing in the Jan. 24 *Boston Globe*, a Harvard psychologist suggests that the increased use of psychiatric medicines and the obesity epidemic may be related.

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

- Prospects are good for new personalized care model: A "prospective care" model helped the Duke University Health System save significantly on medical costs for high-risk employees and cut ED visits and hospital stays ([JAMA](#), Jan. 27).
- Cut salt, save money (and lives): In addition to saving thousands of lives, lower consumption of salt could save up to \$24 billion in health costs each year, according to a new study in the *NEJM* (referenced in our Diet and Nutrition section, above) ([Wall Street Journal](#), Jan. 21).
- Insurers on board with Obama public health efforts: The President's plans to take on obesity and tobacco and implement wellness programs are supported by health insurance companies as a way to address rising health care costs ([HealthLeaders Media](#), Feb. 4).
- After further review, Safeway wellness plan may not be all that: A well-publicized initiative to reward employees for health behavior, which has been embraced by both parties, may not offer the cost savings originally promised ([Washington Post](#), Jan. 17)
- Wellness "incentives:" The carrot or the stick? The unintended ethical consequences of "wrongly implemented" wellness programs may include exacerbating inequity in the health system, argue the authors of a Dec. 30 *NEJM* editorial.

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### Disclaimer

The external links in this newsletter are provided for informational purposes only and may not necessarily reflect the official positions or policies of the AMA.

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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.

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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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