

Healthy Lifestyles e-Letter

January 2010

Dear Reader,

As we celebrate a new year, and a new decade, it's time to begin assessing the nation's progress towards meeting the Healthy People 2010 goals.

Unfortunately, the early prognosis is no cause for celebration. In 1990, about 41 percent of the goals were achieved, dropping to 24 percent in 2000. For 2010, data collection and reporting are still under way, but estimates are that only 20 percent of goals have been met ([CP](#), Dec. 31).



Help make the next 10 years healthier ones for all Americans. Be sure to share this newsletter with your colleagues, and refer frequently to the AMA's "[Promoting Healthier Lifestyles](#)" page for news and updates on our many activities.

On a personal note, I am retiring from my work at the AMA so this will be my last message to you as editor of this e-letter. Although we started this e-Letter only a short time ago, we have been pleased with the response to it and want to encourage you to share it with your colleagues.

As we tried to recognize in determining the scope of this venture, the variety of health concerns that come to play in considering healthy lifestyles is indeed great. We chose the health concerns and behaviors that seem to affect the greatest number of people and which individually and together result in the leading immediate causes of mortality and morbidity. We also included one often left out, mental health, because we know that making changes in one's life is affected by how optimistic and positive you feel about yourself and your ability to change your own behavior and the environment you live in.

We live in a specialist society that tends to want to address only one health concern at a time -- based on data, or personal passions or interests, training, funding or even just the desire to do something new. But building healthier lives involves addressing a multitude of issues over time -- and looking at how these issues interact.

For much of my professional career I've focused on alcohol and health, which is often a neglected health concern. I could come up with a lot of reasons why this is so, but addressing the health of the population or individuals with our blinders on helps no one.

So, as our readers, please provide our staff with suggestions and ideas, and to highlight research, resources and documents you think would help promote dialogue and offer new insights into the ways health behaviors and issues interact - and consequently to develop more effective ways of addressing them. I wish you well.

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

- [Ex-QB calls for kids to exercise 60 minutes daily: Football commentator and former pro quarterback Ron Jaworski spoke at a Congressional hearing in December, calling childhood obesity levels "startling" \(AP, Dec. 16\).](#)

Learn more about physical activity and exercise. . .

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

2. Diet and nutrition

- [When counting calories, it's all relative: A new study finds that including calorie counts as well as the recommended daily caloric intake on restaurant menus leads to reduced consumption \(USA Today, Dec. 21\).](#)
- [In calorie counts, caveat emptor: A recent survey of 10 chain restaurants found that "the number of calories in 29 meals or other menu items was an average of 18 percent higher than listed" \(CBS News, Jan. 7\).](#)
- [Diet: The big picture. A special double issue of the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, available free online, focuses on the linkages between the food system, agriculture, and healthier diets and healthier communities.](#)
- [Big Apple targets salt: New York City wants to cut the amount of salt in packaged and restaurant food by one quarter within five years -- not just in the city itself but throughout the country \(New York Times, Jan. 11\).](#)

The AMA is a partner in the city's National Salt Reduction Initiative. [For more information](#) and/or to provide technical comments on the proposed targets.

Learn more about diet and nutrition. . .

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

3. Obesity and overweight

- CDC: Obesity rate has leveled off. Good news: Obesity rates have remained unchanged for the last five years (for men) and around 10 years (for women and children). Bad news: More than one third of adults are obese ([New York Times](#), Jan. 14).
- Love handles? For women, living with a partner versus being single increases the chances of weight gain, according to a large study from Australia ([New York Times](#), Jan. 5).
- To stop binge eating, talk it out: For long-term weight loss, talk therapy is better than behavioral weight-loss programs for binge eating ([Los Angeles Times](#), Jan. 4).
- To lose weight, money talks: Cash for shedding pounds is the newest wellness craze ([Time](#), Jan. 4). Craze or not, the idea has merit, as reported in a study published in [JAMA](#).
- Diet cola or cocaine? A commentary in *JAMA* expressing concern about artificially sweetened beverages noted a study in which rodents favored saccharin over cocaine ([JAMA](#), Dec. 9).
- Obesity bigger threat than smoking? A recent study finds that "quality-adjusted life years lost to obesity are equal to, or greater than, those lost because of smoking" ([USA Today](#), Jan. 6).
- Coffee and tea may keep type 2 diabetes at bay: Four cups of coffee or tea each day may lower one's chances of developing type 2 diabetes, according to a study in the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#) (Dec. 14/28). [Bloomberg News](#) (Dec. 15) reported on the study.

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

- Surgeons should seize "teachable moment": Surgery can serve as an impetus to patients to adopt better health habits; surgeons and anesthesiologists should take advantage of this opportunity to counsel patients about tobacco ([Archives of Surgery](#), Dec.).
- Lots of F's on tobacco report card: In 2009, the US government made some progress in tobacco control, but many states got a failing grade, and 10 states cut their programs, according to an [American Lung Association report](#).
- In Massachusetts, signs of hope, and a potential model: The number of poor people in MA who smoke has dropped significantly since 2006, when smoking cessation counseling and drugs became available to Medicaid recipients ([New York Times](#), Dec. 17).

Advocates call for a similar plan at the national level, as part of health system reform ([Los Angeles Times](#), Jan. 2).

- No smoking in Tobacco Road restaurants: As of Jan. 2, smoking is no longer allowed in North Carolina in restaurants ([AP](#), Jan. 3).

- Some NYC bars ignoring smoking ban: During Prohibition, the speakeasy flourished; now, in New York City, some high-end bars are taking the "smoke-easy" approach and flouting the city's smoking ban ([New York Times](#), Dec. 31).
- Proposed smoking ban under fire: A plan in Belmont, CA to ban smoking almost everywhere (except for single-family detached homes) has aroused ire as overly intrusive ([Los Angeles Times](#), Jan. 4).

Learn more about smoking cessation and prevention. . .

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

Online training for counseling on secondhand smoke: 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

- Alcohol consumption doesn't prevent stroke: A new long-term study finds that moderate drinking does not aid in the prevention of stroke, and heavy drinking raises stroke risk ([Reuters](#), Jan. 5).
- In Russia, vodka price doubles: To cut Russians' alcohol consumption (the highest in the world), the Kremlin has imposed a doubling in the minimum cost of vodka ([Time](#), Jan. 5).
- [Feds take aim at driving while distracted](#): Research shows that drivers who text can be as impaired in reaction times as those who drive drunk. President Obama has issued an executive order banning federal employees from texting while driving on government business.

Also see Secretary of Transportation Ray La Hood's blog and the "[Drive Against Distraction](#)."

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

- For mild depression, placebos may be sufficient: A new study in [JAMA](#) (Jan. 6) finds that the effectiveness of anti-depressives "varies according to the severity of the depression being treated," such that for mild or moderate cases, the placebo may be as effective as the actual medication.

The [New York Times](#) (Jan. 6) reported on the study.

- Mental health treatments missing the happy medium: Many Americans with depression and other psychiatric ills are either over- or under-treated ([Wall Street Journal](#), Jan. 5)
- For youths, the new "Great Depression?" Compared to 1930s-era students, today's high school and college students are five times as likely to have mental health issues ([St. Louis Beacon](#), Jan. 11).
- Link between late bedtimes and depression among teens? A new study finds that "teens whose parents let them go to bed past midnight were 24 percent more likely to be depressed and 20 percent more likely to have contemplated suicide" ([Bloomberg News](#), Dec. 1).

- Sunshine states of mind: Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that people living in states with abundant sunshine are happier and more satisfied with their lives ([AP](#), Dec. 20).
- Soldier stress, suicides at record levels: Long and repeated combat deployments are leading to increased stress and suicide among U.S. soldiers ([USA Today](#), Jan. 13).
- Journal from the CDC focuses on mental health: The January issue of [Preventing Chronic Disease](#) includes several noteworthy contributions on the intersection between mental health and public health.

7. Cost effectiveness/cost benefits related to prevention

- "Chronic curve" threatens US health system: "Preventive care, care coordination and disease management" are needed to take action on the increasing prevalence of chronic conditions, like diabetes, and their related health care costs ([Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#), Dec. 15).
- Antismoking, exercise programs can pay off: Minor investments in disease prevention programs can yield major savings ([Los Angeles Times](#), Dec. 28).
- Costs of some preventive efforts outweigh the payoff: Not all prevention efforts automatically translate into cost savings ([Los Angeles Times](#), Dec. 28).
- Longer lives have a higher price tag. The good news: Life expectancy in the U.S. is up, according to newly released data from the CDC. The bad news? "Every year that gets tacked on to the average life expectancy costs an extra trillion dollars in expenditures by Social Security and Medicare" ([Bloomberg News](#), Dec. 17).

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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