

William D. Evers, PhD, RD
Cooperative Extension Foods and Nutrition Specialist
Purdue University School of Consumer and Family Sciences
Department of Foods and Nutrition

Whenever we do nutrition education programs, it is nice to have some general health statistics to relate to the topic. Stephen Barrett in his electronic newsletter, Consumer Health Digest, has summarized data from the National Center for Health Statistics. While this information relates to the United States, it can be used as a comparison for any country.

Taken verbatim from the electronic newsletter, Consumer Health Digest #02-42 - Your Weekly Update of News and Reviews - October 15, 2002

LIFE EXPECTANCY UP, DEATH IN INFANCY DOWN UNITED STATES STATISTICS

U.S. Life expectancy hits new high. A new report issued by the National Center for Health Statistics indicates that American adults are living longer, fewer babies are dying in infancy, and the gap between white and black life expectancy has narrowed during the past decade. The key findings include:

- In 2000, average life expectancy at birth hit record highs, with men at 74.1 years and women at 79.5 years. A century earlier, life expectancy was 48 years for men and 51 years for women. Those who reach age 65 now live to an average age of 81 for men and 84 for women
- During the past half-century, death rates among children and adults up to age 24 were cut in half. Mortality among adults 25-64 years fell nearly as much, and dropped among those 65 years and over by a third.
- The infant mortality rate -- deaths before the first birthday -- has dropped 75% since 1950, dropping to a record low of 6.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000, down from 7.1 in 1999.
- More than 40% of adults were smokers in 1965, compared with 23% in 2000. Those without a high school education were still almost three times as likely to smoke cigarettes as college graduates.
- Deaths among children and young adults from unintentional injuries (cancer, and heart disease) are down sharply. Among working-age adults, fewer are dying from unintentional injuries, heart disease, and stroke. For older Americans, the increase in life expectancy is largely due to the sharp drop in deaths from heart disease and stroke.

- Three in five adults ages 20-74 are overweight. One in four Americans is considered obese. Almost 40% engaged in no physical activity during leisure time, and women were more sedentary than men.

One in 10 Americans age 45-54, 1 in 5 of those 55-64 years, 1 in 4 of those 65-74 years, and 1 in 3 of those 75 years and over reported being in fair or poor health.

- Americans spent \$1.3 trillion on health care in 2000, or 13.2% of the gross domestic product, far more than any other nation. A third of the health care dollar was spent on hospital care, about one-fifth on physicians, and almost one-tenth on prescription drugs. The cost of prescription drugs increased 15% a year from 1995-2000 -- faster than any other category of spending.
- Hospital stays keep getting shorter: just 4.9 days on average in 2000. Twenty years ago patients spent more than 7 days in the hospital. Sixty-three percent of all surgeries now are performed as outpatient procedures, with patients being sent home after a short stay in a recovery room. A decade earlier, one-half of all surgeries were on outpatients. In 1980 only 16% were done on outpatients.
- Federal and State government programs - principally Medicare and Medicaid - paid 43% of all medical bills. Private insurance covered 35%, and other private sources paid 5%. Consumers paid 17% out of their own pockets.

The 430-page report, Health, United States, 2002 can be purchased in book form or viewed online at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hs.htm>

Consumer Health Digest is a free weekly e-mail newsletter edited by Stephen Barrett, M.D., and cosponsored by NCAHF and Quackwatch. It summarizes scientific reports; legislative developments; enforcement actions; news reports; website evaluations; recommended and non-recommended books; and other information relevant to consumer protection and consumer decision-making. Other issues of the Digest are accessible through <http://www.ncahf.org/digest02/index.html>

For information about the National Council Against Health Fraud, see <http://www.ncahf.org/about/mission.html>

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