


Chapter Three

So You Think You Are Healthy?

The greatest part of being healthy is thinking you are healthy. Persons who think they are healthy generally do well. Yet, in spite of being healthy, the data from *howsyourhealth* tells us that more than 70% of healthy Americans have concerns about their health. So let's take a look at some of those statistics.

Exercise and Eating (Obesity)

In 1991 about 15% of American adults were very overweight; today almost 30% are seriously overweight. Regardless of income or gender, about half of Americans aged 14-69 rank eating, weight, and exercise as concerns.

Concerns of Americans	
<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Adults</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Exercise and Eating</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Preventing Cancer and Heart Disease</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Better Health Care</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Drug and Alcohol Abuse</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Violence</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Sexual Issues and Diseases</p>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Preteens and Teens</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Exercise and Eating</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Violence or Abuse</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Depression or Suicide</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Substance Abuse</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Sexual Issues</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Sexual diseases or AIDS</p>
<p style="margin: 0;">Higher Rate</p>  <p style="margin: 0;">Lower Rate</p>	
<p>Table 4</p>	

Being overweight has a high health and social cost, but eating is enjoyable and dieting is not. Eating well and maintaining ideal body weight is difficult in both rich and poor countries because of the high consumption of carbohydrates (sugars) and low levels of exercise. In fact, some experts now worry that the fad for “low fat” foods often leads to higher carbohydrate consumption.

About 1/4 of Americans exercise 3 or more days a week hard enough to breathe heavily and sweat. This level of exercise is the best for maintaining health and prolonging life. When adults combine a low calorie diet with a 3 times per week exercise activity, they can expect to lose around 5-10% of their weight over 6 months.

While more than a third of adult Americans say they are trying to lose weight, only about 1/5 are actually restricting calories and increasing their exercise. Instead, they often use special diets, herbs, and many other methods to lose weight (including cigarettes!). There are a few medications approved for weight loss and many herbal compounds (including ephedra and caffeine) that are used, but none have been shown to have a large, or lasting effect.

A Recent History of Weight-Loss and Diet Aids

1898 Fletcher Chewing	1963 Sugar-free Tab Soda
1918 Count calories	1972 High Protein, High Fat Diet
1929 Smoke Lucky Strikes	1980 Anorexia Nervosa is named
1935 Grapefruit Diet	1981 Beverly Hills Diet
1936 Radio Reducing Parties	1982 Lipo Suction
1948 Amphetamines	1988 Optifast Liquid Diet
1958 Saccharin	1990s Fen-phen Diet
1961 Weight Watchers	1997 Fen-phen Withdrawn

Table 5

Being overweight increases the tendency toward high blood pressure and high levels of bad fats in the blood (most often measured as cholesterol). For most people, the first treatment for high blood pressure and high cholesterol is to lose weight and to change their diet.

Being severely overweight has a big impact on overall health. For example, almost two times the number of severely overweight people have had at least one sick day requiring bed-rest or restricted activity in the past 3 months, as compared to those who are not severely overweight. About 45% take 3 or more medications each

day versus 20% of the non-obese. The following Table illustrates other impacts on health.

Being More Than 15% Overweight Has A Big Impact

Frequency of Problems for Adults Aged 19-69:	If Obese	If Not Obese
High Blood Pressure	45%	15%
Arthritis	30%	15%
Diabetes	20%	5%
Limitations from Pain	35%	20%
Limitations from Feelings	25%	15%
Limits in Daily Activities	15%	5%

Table 6

Preventing Cancer, Heart Disease, and Death

The next most frequent concern of adults is the prevention of cancer and heart disease. Not surprisingly, the concern about these common causes of death increases with age, from about 25% in the healthy young to about 50% in older adults.

The Tables that follow show causes of death for which there are screening tests and/or treatments to help prevent death. To use these Tables, pick an age that is closest to your age and gender. Then see how many people out of 1000 at your age will die of a specific cause within 10 years.

By age 60, heart attacks and strokes are the most common preventable killers for men and women. Treatment of even mildly elevated blood pressure can reduce heart attack and stroke risk at all ages.

To encourage early detection of breast cancer we have done a good job of alerting the general public "1 in 9 women will get breast cancer." It is true that breast cancer is the most common cause death for women age

50 (See the Table). But it is also true, that women are almost as likely to die of a heart attack at that same age, 3 times as likely at age 65, and 17 times at age 80.

Yet, women may not be doing as much to prevent heart disease as they are for breast cancer. Also, colon cancer is equal in frequency to breast cancer as a killer for 70 year old women and is just as preventable.

Causes of Death in Ten Years for 1000 Non-Smoking Women of Different Ages							Table 7
Your Age Now	Heart Attack	Stroke	Breast Ca	Colon Ca	Cervix Ca	Pneum	Influnz
50	4	2	5	2	1	1	0
65	30	10	9	6	1	4	0
80	153	62	12	14	1	30	1

Causes of Death in Ten Years for 1000 Non-Smoking Men of Different Ages							Table 8
Your Age Now	Heart Attack	Stroke	Colon Ca	Prostate Ca	Pnuem	Influnz	
50	12	2	2	1	1	0	
65	61	12	9	8	6	0	
80	196	53	16	32	38	1	

About 85% of women recall having a mammogram and a clinical breast exam in the past two years. However, only 45% of men and women have had a colon cancer test in the past two years.

Both colon and breast cancer are detectable and treatable. Experts believe that the colon cancer test and the mammogram combined with early treatment of abnormal tests are as much as 50% effective in saving lives. Unfortunately, the tests are not perfect and some aggressive tumors spread before they can be detected.

While cervical cancer is a relatively rare cancer, there is a very effective screening test and treatment. Thankfully, 80% of women aged 19-69 reported having had a pap test in the past two years.

Sex, Drugs and Violence

Stories about sex, drugs, and violence are in the news every day, yet these topics only concern about 20% of older teens and half that many adults. Despite the low rate of concern, the problems are all too real. Teenagers are more likely to die from violence or an accident than any other cause and domestic abuse is present in every social class in America.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and teenage pregnancies are an increasing risk for our youth. Interestingly, 95% of young women aged 19-49 say they understand how to prevent STDs and unwanted pregnancies, however, only 60% of the males report they understand important information about birth control and STDs!

Health Threats vs. Marketing

Because most adults have health concerns, health product advertisers have a huge market. They also have an economic incentive to make health threats seem large and the benefits of their treatment seem even larger. The ads seem to say, "just do what we recommend and you will live happily ever after."

These advertising messages are so common that many Americans have become numb to the health threats and often say "everything is bad for you" or "everything causes cancer". Some will even use that as an excuse not to change their behavior.

To truly understand some of the threats to your health, take a look at the causes of death facing Americans in the next ten years.

The following Tables show the rate of death for every 1000 women and men for certain causes. The last two columns compare the death rate from all causes between smokers and non-smokers.

Causes of Death in Ten Years				Table 9		
for 1000 Non-Smoking Women of Different Ages						
Your Age Now	Heart and Blood Vessels	Cancer	All Causes Non-Smokers	All Causes If Smokers		
20	-	-	4	8		
40	2	8	26	32		
55	9	15	66	125		
70	71	33	247	470		

Causes of Death in Ten Years				Table 10		
for 1000 Non-Smoking Men of Different Ages						
Your Age Now	Heart and Blood Vessels	Cancer	All Causes Non-Smokers	All Causes If Smokers		
20	-	-	10	23		
40	5	1	27	64		
55	24	9	93	217		
70	114	37	336	786		

Smoking and Lifestyle Changes

Smoking is really bad for your health. Compare all causes for death at any age if they smoke or not. For example, you see that among 55-year-old men, 124 more

deaths will occur in men who smoke than will occur in men who do not smoke. The death rate is also higher for women who smoke.

The highest rates of smokers occur among 19-49 year olds. Teenagers and young adults don't see the impacts of smoking when they are young. It should be obvious, you can decrease your chances of death in the next 10 years by not smoking.

The following chart shows other life style changes that will help prevent death if practiced routinely.

Percent of Deaths Prevented By:

Not smoking - 18%
Good Exercise and Nutrition - 14%
Avoiding Excessive Alcohol - 5%
Safe Motor Vehicle use and Seat belts - 2%

Table 11

Poverty

One of the things that seriously impacts health is poverty. Although it is difficult to change, the facts are clear. There are many scientific studies, but one in England, showed that 5% of higher paid government workers died over a ten-year period compared to 20% of lower paid government workers. These differences persisted even after adjusting for smoking, drinking and exercise habits. These were the same people, same government, same employer, same health benefits, and same medical care. The difference was social class and income levels.

Great effort was made in designing *www.howsyourhealth* to ensure that anyone could use it easily, regardless of education or income level. We found that about 75% of those from low income communities could use the

approach without assistance and have been gratified to see that this web-site is used by a good representation of various neighborhoods based on zip code data.

Special effort was made to include less educated populations and 20% of those aged 19-69, say that they often or always have difficulty paying for essential food, clothing or housing. The impact of being poor on health and health care delivery is made clear in the following Table.

Health Issue	Age 19-69		Age 70+	
	Not Poor	Poor	Not Poor	Poor
Easy Access to Care	80%	60%	80%	45%
Perfect Care	35%	20%	50%	20%
Hospitalized in Year	10%	20%	20%	55%
Sick Day in 3 Months	25%	45%	20%	60%
Limit Daily Activity	5%	25%	15%	45%
Limit by Feelings	20%	35%	25%	50%
Limit by Pain	15%	35%	10%	35%
Bowel Cancer Test	50%	40%	50%	40%
Mammogram	85%	65%	-	-
Pneumonia "Shot"	-	-	65%	45%
Flu "Shot"	-	-	65%	50%

Table 12

The medical poor find it harder to access the health care system for two major reasons. They do not have the money and they have to work so they do not have the time. When they do go to the doctor, they are often very ill, or late in the illness making health care even more critical.

Studies show that the medically poor (those without insurance) have a lower percentage of preventive tests offered to them.

Some will argue that the poor often don't take care of themselves. For example, the poor practice good health habits less frequently (55% versus 75% for the non-poor), smoke more (35% versus 15%), and are more likely to have been told to reduce alcohol consumption (15% versus 5%).

We would argue that the poor may be more responsive to advertisements, (tobacco, fast food, alcohol) and therefore are very well suited to education through *howsyourhealth*.

As you will see in the next Chapter, all persons, rich or poor, can become good self-managers of their health problems.

**You Can Also Go On Line For Lots of
Information about
How to Improve Your Health
and Manage Problems
Without Completing a Survey**

You can access specific information without completing the free *www.howsyourhealth.org* survey by going to the web-site, entering your age and gender, and choosing the "reading option."