

Americans concerned about heart health, but not proactive enough to prevent it

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To help draw attention to National Child Health Day (today), the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association (PCNA) has released findings from a new national consumer survey and launched a campaign to educate families about heart disease, the leading cause of death in the U.S.

The national survey revealed that more than three in five (61%) Americans incorrectly believe that the processes related to heart disease do not begin until adulthood.

Alarming, fewer than four in ten (38%) correctly surmise that people should be concerned about living a heart-healthy lifestyle to prevent a future [heart attack](#) beginning in childhood, and continuing throughout every life stage.

While the old adage says "an apple a day will keep the doctor away," a new study on heart disease shows that a more comprehensive approach to being heart-healthy is key.

According to the study, published in September in an advance online edition of the journal *Circulation*, even with the success of past heart disease awareness and education campaigns the trend toward reducing cardiovascular risk is now headed in a negative direction. The vast majority (92%) of Americans are still at risk, primarily because of the rise in obesity.

"This is a wake up call for parents and their children in particular," says Laura Hayman, Ph.D., RN, a member of the PCNA Board of Directors and a leading researcher on obesity and cardiovascular disease in children, adolescents, and families. "Some strides have been made; however, since more and more children are currently overweight, they are more likely at risk for obesity-related conditions later in life such as hypertension and [type 2 diabetes](#)."

As two Harvard professors noted in an accompanying editorial in the Circulation e-publication, millions of Americans enter adulthood already overweight and thus are putting themselves at risk for a lifetime of disease and early death. "Much potential exists to reverse ominous trends in [cardiovascular risk factors](#) and mortality in the United States, but this is unlikely to occur without making prevention of overweight and obesity a clear national priority," they stated.

Recent research has found that when children learn about heart-healthy eating habits, it can strongly influence their behavior to reduce heart disease risk later in life. Yet, according to the PCNA survey, less than one-third of Americans follow a diet that is healthy for their heart. Also, seven in ten (70%) would not want their kids to adopt their eating habits because they do not think they set a good example when it comes to food choices (26%) or some of the time they eat food that is not healthy (44%).

"We are at a critical juncture," explains Hayman. "It is imperative for parents to lead by example with an all encompassing hearty-healthy lifestyle, making the necessary changes both in diet and physical exercise."

Since the survey found that the majority of Americans are at risk of heart disease due to some lifestyle factor, such as being overweight or having high cholesterol, small incremental changes in diet and physical

activity can have a lasting healthy effect.

To help parents learn how to make important lifestyle changes and become better role models for their children, to help reduce their risk of [heart disease](#) in the future, PCNA has launched a national education campaign called "Family at Heart."

More information: www.FamilyatHeart.org

Source: Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association

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