

Seeking Health Info? Print Media Readers Make Healthier Choices

May 4 2010, By Glenda Fauntleroy

Even with the widespread use of the Internet to get our daily dose of information, people who rely on the print media for their health information - along with those who turn to community organizations - tend to do better than Web-seekers at following a healthy lifestyle, new research finds.

“I think much is to be learned about health information-seeking behaviors and their relationship to the adoption of health behaviors in various demographic groups,” said Nicole Redmond, M.D., who led the team of researchers. “One of the challenges in this area is the rapidly evolving nature of information technology. Telecommunications such as text messaging and Internet access through [smart phones](#) and [social networking sites](#) have created a very different communications landscape in a very short time frame.”

Redmond is in the Division of General Medicine and Primary Care at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. The study, which appears in the June issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), used data from the 2005 and 2007 Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) and included responses from more than 10,000 participants.

The survey asked about which two categories of sources participants were more likely to use for health information. Did they turn to mass media, which included Internet, TV and print media, or interpersonal sources, such as family and friends, community organizations and health

care providers?

Redmond and her colleagues looked for a link between the sources participants chose and whether they followed healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as not smoking, eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and getting recommended [cancer screening](#). They found that print media, community organizations and health care providers showed the strongest associations.

“I was not entirely surprised by the role of community organizations, but I did expect that friends and family would have shown a significant association with some health behaviors as well,” said Redmond.

In the 2005 HINTS, those who used print media and community organizations for information had increased odds of meeting fruit and vegetable recommendations and being a nonsmoker than those who used other sources.

Likewise, in the 2007 survey, those who reported recent use of health care providers as a source for information had 32 percent higher odds of meeting recommended fruit and vegetable intake, and 36 percent higher odds of having had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy than those who didn't use a health care provider.

“In general, the increased trend toward more people seeking health information online or through other public domain sources, such as print publications, is a good thing,” said Jennifer McClure, Ph.D., associate director for research at the Group Health Center for Health Studies in Seattle. “But there is a downside, too. Consumers need to be careful when seeking health care information through the public domain. They need to rely on credible sources and be sure to follow up with their [health care providers](#) before making significant changes to their lifestyle behaviors based on this information.”

More information: Redmond N, et al. Sources of health information related to preventive health behaviors in a national study. Am J Prev Med 38(6), 2010.

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