

# Doctor's health habits affect patient counseling

September 21 2010

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Physician's confidence in their abilities to counsel patients on a healthy diet and exercise may be related to their own personal habits, according to a study by the University of Michigan Cardiovascular Center.

Confidence in counseling depended on a doctor's own exercise time, being overweight, and if the doctor had adequate training in talking to [patients](#) about diet and exercise.

The study, published online ahead of print Oct. 1 in *Preventive Cardiology*, shows doctors' own health habits matter when it comes to patient counseling.

"Living a healthy lifestyle themselves translates into a more believable message to their patients," says lead author Michael Howe, M.D., chief medical resident at U-M Health System. "Physicians are busy, especially during their training; but eating healthy foods and exercising regularly may result in better personal health as well as improved patient care."

A majority of attending physicians, those who have completed their doctor training, talked to patients about a healthy diet compared to only 36 percent of trainees, young doctors still in internship or residency programs.

But in the survey, attending physicians reported taking better care of themselves than trainees whose diets were heavier in fast food.

Both attending and trainee physicians reported low levels of confidence in their ability to effectively counsel patients regarding healthy [lifestyle habits](#). However, greater degrees of self-confidence for counseling were seen with increased levels of personal exercise.

Attending physicians were more likely to exercise four or more days a week and more than 150 minutes a week than trainees. In the survey, 69 percent talked to patients about exercise compared to only 38 percent of trainees who gave exercise counseling.

Adequate training was the strongest predictor for confidence in talking about healthy eating habits, the survey showed.

Few trainees or attending physicians were confident in their ability to change patients' behavior even though it's well-known that weight loss can prevent or alleviate obesity-related diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.

With the prevalence of obesity among adults in the U.S. increasing, "many physicians lack confidence in their ability to counsel patients regarding lifestyle," says senior author Elizabeth Jackson, M.D., an assistant professor of internal medicine at the U-M Health System. "An emphasis on [healthy diet](#) and exercise counseling is an important part of medical education for [physicians](#) of all levels."

**More information:** "Patient related diet and exercise counseling: Do providers own lifestyle habits matter?," Preventive Cardiology, Oct. 1, 2010.

Provided by University of Michigan

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