

# More Americans praying about health, study says

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Praying about health issues dramatically increased among American adults over the past three decades, rising 36 percent between 1999 and 2007, according to a study published by the American Psychological Association.

Researchers analyzed data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 1999, 2002 and 2007 National [Health](#) Interview Surveys for an article in the May issue of the APA journal *Psychology of [Religion and Spirituality](#)*. The study primarily focused on comparisons of results between the 2002 and 2007 surveys, which included, respectively, 30,080 adults (over 18 years old) from 44,540 households and 23,393 adults from 40,377 households.

"The United States did have an increase in worship attendance across multiple religious faiths immediately after the 9/11 attack, but that has not stayed elevated. However, [people](#) continued to use informal and private spiritual practices such as [prayer](#)," said lead author Amy Wachholtz, PhD, of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

"There is also a greater public awareness of Buddhist-based mindfulness practices that can include prayerful meditation, which individuals may also be using to address a variety of health concerns."

People who had a decline in health as well as those with improved health reported more prayer, suggesting that individuals who experience a [progressive disease](#) or an acute health change are more likely to use prayer to cope with the changing circumstances, the article states.

While prayer about health issues increased across all groups, from 43 percent in 2002 to 49 percent in 2007, the data indicated that people with the highest incomes were 15 percent less likely to pray than those with the lowest incomes, and people who exercised regularly were 25 percent less likely to pray than those who didn't exercise. Women, African-Americans and the well-educated were most likely to pray about their health.

"We're seeing a wide variety of prayer use among people with good income and access to medical care," Wachholtz said. "People are not exchanging health insurance for prayer."

A significantly greater proportion of women prayed compared to men, with 51 percent of women reporting prayer in 2002 and 56 percent in 2007, in contrast with 34 percent and 40 percent, respectively, among men. African-Americans were more likely to pray for their health than Caucasians, with 61 percent of African-Americans reporting having done so in 2002 and 67 percent in 2007, compared to 40 percent and 45 percent for Caucasians during the same periods. People who were married, educated beyond high school or had experienced a change in health for better or worse within the last 12 months were also more likely to pray about health concerns, the study found.

The study did not reveal the type of prayer people used, or which occurred first – prayer or the health issue.

**More information:** "National Trends in Prayer Use as a Coping Mechanism for Health Concerns: Changes From 2002 to 2007," Amy Wachholtz, PhD, University of Massachusetts Medical School; Usha Sambamoorthi, PhD, West Virginia University and Morehouse School of Medicine, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, Vol. 3, Issue 2. [www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/rel-3-2-67.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/rel-3-2-67.pdf)

Provided by American Psychological Association

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