

Health of Americans a mixed bag: CDC report

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More are exercising and not smoking, but obesity, diabetes rates still increasing.

(HealthDay) -- There were both good and bad trends in the overall health of Americans in 2011, a new government report shows.

For example, Americans are exercising more, smoking less and getting vaccinated against pneumonia. And the Affordable Care Act means fewer people are going without health care, according to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). However, Americans are more obese than ever and diabetes is hitting older people hard.

The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics released the early findings of their 2011 National [Health Interview Survey](#) on Tuesday.

"Overall, this report, based on data not as yet fully adjusted but

nonetheless valid, demonstrates both significant improvements in the nation's health and health habits, and areas that still require serious attention," said Dr. Pascal James Imperato, dean and Distinguished Service Professor in the School of Public Health at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in New York City.

"Among the latter is the [obesity epidemic](#), which over time will predispose increasingly larger numbers of people to both [type 2 diabetes mellitus](#) and cardiovascular disease," he said.

The decline in smoking rates among adults is very good news and is the result of a combination of extensive public health education efforts, a decline in social acceptance of smoking, restrictions on where people can smoke and the increased costs of smoking, Imperato noted.

"Aerobic exercising has been widely embraced by many younger people, which is an excellent development as it addresses not only the health needs to be active, build muscle tone and [bone density](#), and promote cardiac fitness, but also the prevention of [overweight and obesity](#)," he said.

However, this gain is offset by those who do not exercise and who adhere to unhealthy diets, leading to obesity, Imperato added. "This results in the seemingly contradictory data of 48.4 percent of adults reporting aerobic exercising, and 28.7 percent reporting being obese."

Only a small percentage of the U.S. population (2.4 percent) describes their own personal health as "poor," Imperato pointed out. "The widespread acceptance of poor health behaviors -- resulting in increased body mass indices in many -- is reflected in so few stating that their health is poor," he noted.

"Lack of exercise [and] poor diets rich in fats and carbohydrates are

widely accepted," Imperato said, "along with larger than ever food portion sizes and the volume of sugared drinks consumed."

Highlights of the report include:

- The percentage of adults who drink five or more alcoholic drinks a day has dropped after increasing between 2004 and 2010, to just over 22 percent in 2011.
- Self-reported obesity in Americans over age 20 has climbed from 19.4 percent in 1997 to 28.7 percent in 2011.
- One in five adults aged 65 and older has diabetes versus one in 10 among those aged 45 to 54.
- Only 2.4 percent of Americans rate their personal health as poor.
- Among black children under 15 years of age, 16.6 percent have asthma; that figure is 10 percent for Hispanic children and 7.5 percent for white kids.
- Fifty percent of adults aged 25 to 44 say they have been tested for HIV.
- In 2011, 48.4 percent of adults aged 18 and older said they did aerobic exercise -- the highest percentage ever reported.
- For 6.5 percent of Americans, cost kept them from seeking needed medical care.
- Among those aged 65 and older, 7.3 percent needed assistance with personal care in 2011, compared with 6.4 percent in 2000.
- More adults (3.4 percent) had serious psychological distress during 2011 than in 1999 (2.4 percent).
- The number of U.S. adults who smoke dropped from 24.7 percent in 1997 to 18.9 percent in 2011.
- Most Americans (87 percent) had a usual place to go for medical care in 2011, a little more than the 2010 estimate of 85.4 percent.
- In 2011, almost 67 percent of those aged 65 and older had

received a vaccine against pneumonia, a significant increase from 43 percent in 1997.

"This is, fundamentally, a tale of two series of findings -- those related to outcomes, and those related to behaviors," according to Dr. David Katz, director of the Prevention Research Center at Yale University School of Medicine.

"These are the worst of times when it comes to obesity and diabetes, both of which are at high levels and still rising," he said.

The rise in diabetes rates among older adults has its counterpart in the rising prevalence in children. "More [adults](#) reporting obesity similarly is mirrored by the unprecedented rates of childhood obesity. Obesity and diabetes portend other chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and cancer, so these are ominous findings," Katz stated.

But, the behavioral news is much better, he said.

"Smoking rates continue to decline, whittling away at the nation's single leading cause of premature death. Physical activity rates are rising. All that's missing from this mix is evidence that dietary patterns are improving," he pointed out.

"Maybe, over time, more healthful behaviors will produce better [health](#) outcomes," Katz concluded.

More information: For more on the nation's health, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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