

Americans still making unhealthy choices, CDC reports

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High rates of obesity, heavy drinking, smoking and inactivity reported, but most people getting enough sleep.

(HealthDay)—The overall health of Americans isn't improving much, with about six in 10 people either overweight or obese and large numbers engaging in unhealthy behaviors like smoking, heavy drinking or not exercising, a new government report shows.

Released Tuesday by the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the report found Americans continuing to make many of the [lifestyle choices](#) that have led to soaring rates of [heart disease](#), diabetes and other [chronic illnesses](#), including the following:

- About six of 10 adults drink, including an increase in those who reported episodic heavy drinking of five or more drinks in one

day during the previous year.

- Twenty percent of adults smoke, and less than one-half of smokers attempted to quit in the past year.
- Only one in five adults met federal guidelines for both aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening exercise. One in three was completely inactive when it came to any leisure-time [aerobic activity](#).

The one bright spot in the report came in the area of sleep behavior. About seven in 10 adults meet the federal objective for sufficient sleep.

The findings have been gleaned from nearly 77,000 random interviews conducted between 2008 and 2010.

The numbers reflect persistent trends, said report author Charlotte Schoenborn, a [health statistician](#) at the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

"Changes have not been enormous," Schoenborn said. "It's been a very, very slow process of changing awareness of personal choices for healthier ways of life. All of the health-related federal agencies, and a lot of nonfederal groups, are putting a lot of resources to make people aware of the effect they can have on their own health. This report is just designed to say where we are."

The findings did not surprise Rich Hamburg, deputy director of Trust for America's Health, a nonprofit public health organization.

"I think we're in a situation now where we're at a crossroads," Hamburg said. "We have two paths to go. We're hopeful that if we continue to invest in community-based prevention, if we promote healthy eating and active living, these rates will begin to decrease."

Public health organizations use this report to determine which groups of Americans are susceptible to [unhealthy behaviors](#), study author Schoenborn said.

For example, while overall people are getting enough sleep, it turns out that doesn't hold true for people with marital problems, she said. About 38 percent of divorced, separated, or widowed adults have trouble getting enough sleep, compared with 27 percent of married folks.

While this is not the federal government's official report on obesity, its findings jibe with both public and private research into the epidemic, said Hamburg at Trust for America's Health.

At this point, only seven states have overweight and obesity rates that are under 60 percent, he said.

"We've seen for nearly three decades a rise in adult rates of overweight and obesity," Hamburg said. "We're hoping we are reaching a plateau, but we've hoped for that in the past."

Young adults provide the most hope for the future, it appears. For example, those aged 18 to 24 were the only age group to show a decline in smoking, from 23.5 percent to about 21 percent.

"Smoking has remained very stubborn at one in five adults. It's just a terrible addiction," Schoenborn said. "The one small little glimmer of hope I saw was in the 18- to 24-year-olds, where we saw some improvement. You hear so much about overweight and obesity and chronic diseases, and how much of our health lies in our hands, but nothing seems to be changing much."

For his part, Hamburg said that despite the lack of progress, it is vital to continue pressing the case that Americans have the power to improve

their health through their personal choices. Without lifestyle changes, chronic disease will flourish and health care spending will skyrocket.

"If we can lower obesity trends by a small amount, say 5 percent in each state, we could save millions of American from health problem and save billions of dollars in health spending," he said.

More information: To check out U.S. health goals for 2020, visit HealthyPeople.gov.

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