

Virtually all premature deaths attributable to diet, exercise and tobacco

February 26 2014, by Kathleen Phillips

If a new medication came on the market to help one lose weight, increase exercise, stop smoking and prevent heart disease, cancer, stroke, respiratory illness and diabetes, people would flock to physicians for a prescription and buy stock in the company, one expert believes.

But that's not likely, according to Dr. David Katz, a physician and director of the Yale Prevention Research Center, who spoke at Texas A&M University today.

Yet, the knowledge already exists to prevent those ailments and few are taking advantage, Katz told about 200 people at the "Produce for Health" seminar conducted by Texas A&M's Vegetable and Fruit Improvement Center.

"It's about lifestyle factors and a plant-based diet," Katz said. "We've seen it in repetitive scientific studies."

The Vegetable and Fruit Improvement Center hosted Katz as part of the 20th anniversary of its collaborations among plant production scientists, medical researchers, farmers and food industry experts. The center was created in 1993 as researchers worldwide began to realize the connection between food consumption, food production and human health, according to Dr. Bhimu Patil, director.

"We've known for a long time the top five causes of premature death in humans—[heart disease](#), cancer, [stroke](#), respiratory ailments and [diabetes](#)

," Katz said. "What changed in 1993 was a scientific study that encouraged researchers to realize that these are effects not causes. That's when we began to look for the causes and found that virtually all premature deaths are attributable to diet, exercise and tobacco."

He calls them the feet, fork and fingers: failure to exercise, improper eating and smoking.

"In a study that compared people who eat poorly, have out-of-control weight and smoke to people who eat well, have their weight in control and do not smoke, we learned that reversing any one of those would increase one's lifespan by 50 percent. Reversing all three would increase lifespan by 80 percent," Katz said.

The U.S. fight over health care, he added, was about money not health.

"The whole thing (mandatory health care) is moot if we don't solve this problem with obesity and the projection about what it will do to our future," Katz said, pointing out that obesity in U.S. children may be linked to the recent 35 percent increase in strokes for children 5-14 years old.

A lifestyle change to eat well, exercise and stop [smoking](#) would cut heart disease by 80 percent, diabetes by 90 percent and cancer by 60 percent, he said.

Katz, who also is a medical consultant for ABC News, believes one reason the statistics and data from medical research have not led to massive change toward healthfulness in the nation is because they are "nameless, faceless and impossible to love."

"Just think about you or someone you love having to deal with heart disease, cancer or diabetes," he said, asking for a show of hands, which

indicated virtually everyone in the audience had experienced one or more. "We know what the problem is. Yet only 1.5 percent of the people in the U.S. are eating enough fruits and vegetables daily."

Katz acknowledged that part of the problem is confusion caused by the multitude of diet information—much of it conflicting—on the market. A soon-to-be-released study by his prevention research center examined many of the diets being touted as the healthiest.

"All of the diets can be considered," he said. "But instead, focus on the overlap of them all, which would be to eat food, but not too much and mostly plants."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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