

New research shows people are thinking about their health early in the week

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A new study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* analyzing weekly patterns in health-related Google searches reveals a recurring pattern that could be leveraged to improve public health strategies.

Investigators from San Diego State University, the Santa Fe Institute, Johns Hopkins University, and the Monday Campaigns, analyzed "healthy" Google searches (searches that included the term healthy and were indeed health-related, e.g., "healthy diet") originating in the U.S. from 2005 to 2012. They found that on average, searches for health topics were 30 percent more frequent at the beginning of the week than on days later in the week, with the lowest average number of searches on Saturday.

This pattern was consistent year after year, week after week, using a daily measure to represent the proportion of healthy searches to the total number of searches each day.

"Many illnesses have a weekly clock with spikes early in the week," said SDSU's John W. Ayers, lead author of the study. "This research indicates that a similar rhythm exists for positive [health behaviors](#), motivating a new research agenda to understand why this pattern exists and how such a pattern can be utilized to improve the public's health."

Joanna Cohen, PhD, a co-author of the study and professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, added, "We could be seeing this effect because of the perception that Monday is a fresh start,

akin to a mini New Year's Day. People tend to indulge in less healthy behaviors on the weekend, so Monday can serve as a 'health reset' to get back on track with their health regimens."

"It's interesting to see such a consistent and similar rhythm emerging from search data," added Benjamin Althouse, study co-author and Omidyar Fellow at the Santa Fe Institute. "These consistent rhythms in healthy searches likely reflect something about our collective mindset, and understanding these rhythms could lead to insights about the nature of [health behavior change](#)."

Results showed that search volumes on Monday and Tuesday were three percent greater relative to Wednesday, 15 percent greater than Thursday, 49 percent greater than Friday, 80 percent greater than Saturday, and 29 percent greater than Sunday.

The team also examined whether media exposure could be driving this weekly pattern. Co-author Mark Dredze from Johns Hopkins said, "We tested this hypothesis by monitoring the daily frequency of news stories encouraging healthy lifestyles, but those stories actually peaked on Wednesdays and were statistically independent of healthy searches."

According to the published paper, "Understanding circaseptan rhythms around health behaviors can yield critical [public health](#) gains. For instance, government-funded health promotion programs spend \$76.2 billion annually and their cost-effectiveness can be improved by targeting the population on weekday(s) when more individuals are contemplating health habits."

Morgan Johnson, MPH, from The Monday Campaigns and study co-author, noted that leveraging Monday is a simple, cost-effective way to nudge people towards healthier behavior. "The challenge we face in public health is to help people sustain healthy behaviors over time. Since

Monday comes around every seven days when people are 'open to buy' health, it can be used as a cue to help create healthy habits for life."

Provided by San Diego State University

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