

Doctors should recommend healthy lifestyle modifications more often

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Doctors give their patients advice about healthy lifestyle changes too rarely. A statistical analysis of U.S. health data conducted by MedUni Vienna researchers together with international partners has shown that people suffering from obesity, diabetes and other high-risk conditions are much too rarely encouraged to eat more healthily and to take more

exercise. Much more emphasis should be placed on such medical advice, according to the researchers.

In the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), U.S. patients were asked whether their health provider had informed them about any lifestyle modifications they should make. As shown by previous studies, medical advice plays an important role in encouraging patients to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The [statistical analysis](#) conducted by the research group led by Igor Grabovac from MedUni Vienna's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine (Center for Public Health) showed that doctor's consultations rarely include preventive advice for healthy/normal-weight patients (9.8 percent received advice about physical exercise and 1 percent about nutrition and physical exercise). And even those in high-risk groups, such as people with obesity, diabetes or hypertension, much too rarely receive [medical advice](#) about adopting a healthier lifestyle. For example, only 56 percent of patients with a combination of obesity and diabetes report receiving encouragement from their doctor to modify their lifestyle.

People who are healthy but already overweight or even obese must act quickly to prevent the onset of conditions such as hypertension, diabetes or cardiovascular diseases. This can only be done by making lifestyle changes. However, only 20 percent of this group report receiving relevant advice from their doctor.

Is the situation similar in Austria?

"There have been no comparable statistical surveys in Austria, such as the NHANES, and so it is difficult to say whether the situation is similar here," explains principal investigator Igor Grabovac. "However, it is clear that the health system in the USA is missing an important

opportunity for preventive healthcare."

The researchers plan to conduct further statistical analyses from the available dataset and also to collect data specific to Austria. "We are planning to conduct our own surveys about the situation in Austrian outpatient clinics in the near future," says Grabovac.

More information: Igor Grabovac et al. Healthcare Providers' Advice on Lifestyle Modification in the US Population: Results from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2011-2016, *The American Journal of Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.amjmed.2018.11.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2018.11.021)

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