

Are Americans As Healthy As They Think?

Bloomfield, Conn. -- May 21, 2007 - Most Americans think they are in excellent or very good health, but when it comes to healthy habits - exercising, maintaining a healthy weight and managing stress - their actions don't always match their words, according to Health and Well-being in America, a survey sponsored by Cigna HealthCare.

More than half (57%) of those surveyed said they are in "excellent or very good health." One in six reports being in better health than a year ago. But are they really? The same survey shows that when Americans were asked how others would characterize their health:

- Slightly more than half (54%) agree others would say they need to lose 10 pounds. Yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated two-thirds (66%) of U.S. adults are actually overweight or obese.
- A whopping 75% agree others would say they are in good physical shape, but only 49% believe others would say they exercise vigorously three times each week. In fact, more than half of U.S. adults do not get enough physical activity to benefit their health, and 24% are not active at all in their leisure time, according to the CDC.
- More than eight out of 10 agree others would say they live a balanced life (85%) and manage stress effectively (84%). However, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated one in four U.S. adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.

"Addressing the gap between consumers' perception of health and reality is a vital first step in encouraging actions that will result in health improvement," said Dr. Allen Woolf, Cigna senior vice president and medical officer. "Lifestyle choices contribute significantly to many health risks, but most people can make meaningful changes in health behaviors with the right support system and strategies that fit their personal needs and situation."

Well-Being Defined Beyond Physical Health

Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of health all contribute significantly - and in almost equal measure -- to Americans' overall sense of well-being. A strong faith in a divine being was most often selected as the single "most important" contributor to a personal sense of well-being, followed by harmonious family relations and feeling physically well.

The survey found that Americans give freedom from serious illness or disease (69%) and practicing good hygiene (67%) top ratings (a rating of 10 out of 10)¹; on importance to their sense of personal well-being. Almost as important are mental wellness (60%) and having a positive outlook on life (60%). Money (36%) and success at work (31%) are rated as important by far fewer.

"We have long known the relationship between the health of the mind and the body," said Keith Dixon, president of Cigna Behavioral Health and Care Allies. "That's why it's important to take a holistic view of each individual and the many factors that influence his or her health and health habits."

Why are we Optimistic?

According to the survey, most Americans know the fundamentals of good health, such as diet and exercise. Forty-two percent of respondents said exercising and/or getting into better shape is the most important thing they can do this year to improve their health, followed by 16% who cited losing weight as most important and 8% who cited stopping smoking as most important.

"The survey findings also suggest that while overall we might be able to identify what to do to be healthy, we're having less success when it comes to acknowledging risk, motivating ourselves to make changes and knowing how to make these changes successfully," said Dr. Woolf. "That's why Cigna is focusing our prevention and wellness programs around the five key areas needed to help people make lasting changes in health behavior -- education, motivation, skill, opportunity and reinforcement."

Most Americans who say exercise (42%) or eating a healthy diet (5%) are the most important things they can do to improve their health believe they will be at least "somewhat successful" at improving their diet (96%), exercising more (90%), and losing weight (85%). The key to their optimism, according to the survey, is that they had already had some success and were determined to continue this healthy behavior. Only half of those who feel managing stress and smoking cessation are important believe they can successfully stop smoking (55%) or manage stress (51%).

"Behavior change is complex, and is influenced by social and environmental factors that may be difficult to address," said Dixon. "The key is understanding an individual's readiness for change and then giving that individual tools, strategies and incentives that help him or her achieve small "wins" on a consistent basis."

Reasons for Pessimism, Too

Despite America's emphasis on exercise and diet, respondents said that lack of time or too many work and family commitments (56%) prevents them from exercising more. When it comes to losing weight, respondents pointed to poor habits (34%) and a lack of discipline (32%) as obstacles.

Americans are also experiencing stress-related symptoms, with women experiencing more of all types of stress symptoms than men. According to survey respondents:

- 70% of Americans reported they experience one or more stress-related symptoms each week, with neck and back pain being the most common symptoms.
- 49% think others would say they work too much, and 31% think others would say they need to control their anger better.
- 40% of Americans report becoming irritable or losing their temper when they are under stress, while 10% say they don't behave differently at all.
- To cope with stress, Americans say they turn to exercise (31%) and prayer and meditation (12%).

Whom do we Trust?

Emotional support is just as important as medical support when it comes to help with health issues. According to the survey, 39% of Americans rely on family members for help in addressing health issues, while doctors (25%), friends (23%) and religious organizations (21%) are also common sources of support.

Americans also seek health information from a variety of sources. Nine of 10 Americans seek health information from their doctor and 84% turn to a family member or close friend, while well over half also seek information from the Internet (67%), non-profit health organizations (59%) and health insurance companies (57%). Far fewer (25%) turn to their employer or workplace, and respondents said employers and the Internet were their least-trusted sources of information.

"Consumers are turning to multiple sources, including their health plans, for health care information," said Ken Sperling, Cigna HealthCare senior vice president. "We believe health plans have a critical role in providing information in simple and easy-to-understand tools that engage consumers and help them make decisions about their health care. That's why Cigna is investing in online coaching and the next generation of information tools that will help make it easier for consumers as they interact with the health care system."

Demographics Play a Role in How People Feel

Age, income and where respondents live also factor in to Americans' views of their health and well-being:

- More elderly and lower-income households cite managing serious disease as their most important health issue, while more adults ages 25 through 49 and those from wealthier households select losing weight as their most important health issue.
- Compared to other groups, more adults ages 35 through 70 agree others would say they need to lose 10 pounds (57%-64%), but far fewer people in this age group agree others would say they are on a diet (36%-42%) or exercise regularly (48%-50%).
- More adults ages 18 through 34 agree others would say they don't get enough sleep or have issues with anger than other age groups. Younger adults ages 18-24 are more likely than older adults to agree that others would say they smoke too much.

Regional Differences

The survey also included a more detailed look at nine metropolitan areas, revealing significant contrasts among different regions:

- In Denver, 83% of people said they believe others would say they are in good shape, the highest of any city surveyed, and only 36% said others would say they need to lose 10 pounds, the lowest of any city.
- In Los Angeles, people view themselves as being healthy and in good shape but also want to get into better shape. About eight in 10 agree that others would say they are in good shape (79%) and full of energy (80%), yet almost half (46%) feel that exercising and getting into better shape is the most important thing they can do to improve their health.
- People in Atlanta, Dallas and Houston are more likely than those in other locations to say that having a strong faith in a divine being is most important to their personal well-being.
- In Washington, DC, respondents listed physical wellness as the most important factor to their sense of well-being, followed by strong faith and harmonious family relations.
- In the Midwest, Chicagoans cited harmonious family relations as the most important factor to their well-being, while in Cleveland, 60% of the residents agree others would say they exercise vigorously three days a week, which was the highest of any city surveyed, while 43% agreed others would say they worked too much, the lowest of any city surveyed.
- New Yorkers experience the most stress compared to other cities, but they say they take it in stride. One in six New Yorkers say they do not behave differently when stressed, the highest of any city surveyed.

About the Survey

The Health and Well-being in America survey, conducted by Yankelovich, Inc., involved 20-minute telephone interviews with 1,000 adults 18 years and older in February 2007. The sampling error is +/- 3%. An additional 150 interviews were conducted in nine cities to provide regional comparisons. The survey sample was adjusted accordingly to match U.S. Census data on age, gender, race and geographic location and data was weighted to a match to population percentages reported in the U.S. Census. Statistical testing was conducted on the data to ensure overall significance and to allow for statistically valid comparisons between cities.

About Cigna HealthCare

Cigna HealthCare, based in Bloomfield, CT, provides medical benefits plans, dental coverage, behavioral health coverage, pharmacy benefits and products and services that integrate and analyze information to support consumerism and health advocacy. "Cigna HealthCare" refers to certain operations of Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, which is an operating subsidiary of Cigna Corporation (NYSE: CI). Products and services are provided by such operating subsidiaries and not by Cigna Corporation. Reporters: for the latest news on Cigna, please visit the Cigna Newsroom @ <http://cigna.mediaroom.com> .

¹ Respondents were able to assign a top rating to multiple attributes

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