

# Kansans Move into Health



Kansas State University  
Agricultural Experiment Station  
and Cooperative Extension Service



*Tandalayo Kidd, Specialist,  
and Carolyn Snyder, Graduate Research Assistant,  
Department of Human Nutrition*

## What is health?

Health can mean different things to different people. Webster's Dictionary defines health as:

- ▶ the condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit;
- ▶ freedom from physical disease or pain;
- ▶ the general condition of the body.

By making healthy lifestyle changes, you can decrease your risk of disease or improve your quality of life.

## Adopting a healthy lifestyle

Consumers are inundated with magazine images of slim models and headlines telling readers they can lose 10 pounds in two weeks. For decades, Americans have fought to be thin. What if, instead, they decided to fight to be healthy?

Most of us want a life full of health, energy and independence long past retirement. Leading that healthy lifestyle means consuming a balanced diet that includes a variety of foods, maintaining a healthy weight, participating in daily physical activity, eliminating tobacco, managing stress and knowing the risk factors for disease.

This fact sheet will help you identify risk factors for disease, discuss ways to incorporate physical activity into daily life and provide tips for a balanced diet.

## Know the risks

What would happen if you were unable to work for two weeks? A month? What if you were unable to take care of yourself? Would your spouse or loved ones have to leave work

to take care of you? Each year, hospitalization and lost wages from heart attacks and strokes cost more than \$13 billion.

Knowing risk factors associated with disease is one of the first steps to living a long, healthy life. Poor dietary habits and an inactive lifestyle put you at risk – both medically and financially – for chronic diseases such as colon cancer, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, osteoporosis and stroke.

What can you do to decrease the risk? When making lifestyle changes, start by focusing on just a couple of areas. First, identify risk factors that you can modify, treat or control. Then understand the risk factors you cannot control and how they affect your chances of developing disease.

## Risk factors to modify, treat or control

- ▶ **Tobacco** smoke raises LDL (bad cholesterol), lowers HDL (good cholesterol), increases the chance of developing lung cancer and increases the chance that platelets (the component of the blood that forms clots) will stick together and block blood flow. The risk of developing coronary heart disease is two to four times higher in smokers.
- ▶ **High blood cholesterol** builds up in artery walls, causing them to harden and narrow, and reducing blood flow to the heart.
- ▶ **High blood pressure** makes the heart work harder to pump blood through the body. The heart eventually becomes thicker and stiffer, increasing risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney failure and congestive heart failure.

- ▶ **Physical inactivity** is a risk factor for coronary heart disease and obesity, as well as osteoporosis, due to lack of weight-bearing or strength-training exercise.
- ▶ **Obesity** or being overweight increases the likelihood of developing heart disease and stroke, even for those who have no other risk factors. Excess body fat, especially around the waist, increases the heart's workload.
- ▶ **Diabetes mellitus** increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. If you have diabetes, work closely with your health-care providers and follow their advice to manage it and control other risk factors.
- ▶ **Alcohol consumption**, in excess, can raise blood pressure; cause irregular heartbeat or heart failure; lead to stroke; and contribute to high triglycerides, cancer and other diseases. One drink is defined as 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1½ ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (such as vodka or gin).
- ▶ **Stress** affects the body and mind, contributing to heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, cancer and depression.

#### Major risk factors that can not be changed

- ▶ **Advancing age** increases the chance of coronary heart disease. More than 83 percent of people who die of coronary disease are 65 or older. Bones become weaker with age, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.
- ▶ **Gender** is a factor. Men have a greater risk of heart attack than women, and the risk occurs earlier in life. Women have a greater chance of developing osteoporosis because they have less bone mass.
- ▶ **Heredity** (including race) can increase risk. Children of parents with heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves. African-Americans have a greater chance of developing high blood pressure and heart disease than Caucasians. Heart disease risk is also

higher among Mexican-Americans, native Americans, native Hawaiians and some Asian-Americans. Asian and Caucasian women have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis.

Since you cannot control your age, gender, race or family heritage, it is important to treat and control other risk factors.

#### Are Kansans moving toward health?

According to Kansas State University's Community Health Institute, 78 percent of adult Kansans are not physically active on a regular basis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) set an activity recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity five or more days a week. Four out of five adult Kansans fail to meet that recommendation.

To encourage Kansans to be physically active, K-State Research and Extension developed *Walk Kansas* ([www.walkkansas.org](http://www.walkkansas.org)), a science-based program to help Kansans start and maintain a regular routine of physical activity. The eight-week walking program begins each March with family members, co-workers, friends and neighbors teaming up to collectively walk the distance (423 miles) equivalent to walking across the state. (Contact your local K-State Research and Extension office for details.)

#### Increase physical activity

To increase your activity level, you don't need to be thin or fit, join a gym or buy any special equipment. Moderate activity includes brisk walking, gardening, housework or playing with children. Those who want to become more active can make small lifestyle changes to achieve big results.

- ▶ Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- ▶ Walk part (or all) of the way to work or school.

- ▶ Go for a walk on your lunch break.
- ▶ Walk to the store.
- ▶ Get up and change TV channels without the remote.
- ▶ Park at the edge of the grocery store parking lot instead of finding the closest spot.
- ▶ Pick up a pedometer to measure the number of steps you take each day. The national recommendation is 10,000 steps a day. If you currently walk 4,000 a day, work up to 6,000, and keep building.
- ▶ Take a 10-minute walk before dinner and work up to 30 minutes.

### Benefits of physical activity

Physical activity leads to a healthier lifestyle:

- ▶ Helping prevent heart disease and stroke.
- ▶ Lowering blood pressure; raising the HDL (good cholesterol) level and lowering level of LDL (bad cholesterol).
- ▶ Reducing body fat.
- ▶ Helping to prevent and control noninsulin-dependent diabetes.
- ▶ Building and preserving muscle mass and improving the body's ability to use calories.
- ▶ Combined with proper nutrition, helping to control weight and prevent obesity – a major risk factor for many diseases.
- ▶ Increasing muscle strength and endurance, and improving flexibility and posture as ways to help prevent back pain.
- ▶ Promoting bone formation and preventing bone loss associated with aging.
- ▶ Improving mood and self-image. Researchers have found that exercise is likely to reduce depression and anxiety, and may help manage stress.

## Move toward change

What are the reasons you are not more physically active? Write down barriers that prevent you from being physically active; then develop a solution to each barrier.

### Barriers to Physical Activity

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Solutions

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Balance the Diet



Have you noticed that the Food Guide Pyramid has undergone a makeover? The new *MyPyramid* food guidance system is designed to reflect the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. See it at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).

The pyramid shows that most daily calories should come from the grain group (the widest band), followed by vegetables, milk, fruit, meat and beans, and oils. Each person's daily calorie needs differ because of age, gender and activity level. Improvement occurs when small steps lead toward the goal.





## Recommendations

As basic tips, *MyPyramid* recommends:

- ▶ make half your grains whole
- ▶ vary your veggies
- ▶ focus on fruits
- ▶ get your calcium-rich foods
- ▶ go lean with protein

**Whole grains** contain the entire grain kernel – bran, germ and endosperm. This group includes whole-wheat flour, bulgur, oatmeal and brown rice. Grains provide B vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber.

**Vegetables** are cholesterol-free, and most are low in fat and calories. They provide fiber; potassium; vitamins A, E and C; and folate.

**Fruits** provide some of the same nutrients as vegetables and some grain products, but different fruits and vegetables contain different phytochemicals to help protect the body against heart disease and certain cancers.

**Calcium**, from the milk group, helps

build bones and teeth, and maintain bone mass. Vitamin D helps improve the body's calcium absorption and maintenance.

**Protein** foods can be high in saturated fats and cholesterol, and can raise the level of LDL cholesterol. High LDL levels increase the risk of coronary heart disease, so choices from this group should be lean or low in fat.

## Healthy for a lifetime

Use *MyPyramid* as a guide to choosing food and activities. Select foods from each group to meet your nutritional needs. Gradually improve food choices and physical activity levels. Start with small goals and add new ones as you progress. Stay within your daily calorie needs, and plan physical activity for 30 minutes most days of the week.

You may feel better and live longer by adopting a healthier way of life. You can also become a positive role model. Regardless of what you do, personalize active behavior changes to fit your life as you move into health.

### Authors

Tandalayo Kidd, PhD, RD, LPN, Specialist, and  
Carolyn Snyder, RD, LD, Graduate Research Assistant,  
Department of Human Nutrition, Kansas State University

### Resources

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