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Americans skimp on healthy activities in bad economy

DALLAS - (May 17, 2009) Yet another negative result of the bad economy: Americans are cutting back on healthy activities such as eating fresh foods and exercising regularly.

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In a national omnibus survey of 1,000 people conducted in March 2009 by the American Heart Association:

- 57 percent said the economy has affected their ability to take care of their health.
- 32 percent have made a change in the last six months to save money, such as delaying preventive care appointments, not taking medications or skipping the dentist.
- 25 percent of those with gym memberships have cancelled in the previous six months.
- 42 percent plan to make changes in the next six months that may impact their health, such as buying fewer fruits and vegetables.

Results of the study spell trouble for Americans' overall well-being and heart health in particular, said Timothy Gardner, M.D., President of the American Heart Association.

"We've made dramatic gains in recent years in our fight against heart disease and stroke, but trends like these threaten to reverse these gains. We need to remind people that even in hard times their health is important. Physical activity, in particular, is an easy, inexpensive way for people to prevent heart disease and manage their stress—another byproduct of a tough economy."

The American Heart Association encourages walking because it's the most accessible form of physical activity and it has the lowest drop out rate among Americans. The association supports the federal government's recently revised guidelines for physical activity, which focus more on a cumulative amount of activity over a week, rather than a specific amount each day.

"The message now is that physical activity can be worked in any time, anywhere," said Gardner. "The important thing is to make sure you are getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week. We encourage people to incorporate regular walking into their normal routines, such as during the work day."

In the last two years, the association has recognized nearly 1,000 companies as "Fit-Friendly", meaning they champion the health of their employees and offer opportunities for wellness at work.

Employers can save \$16 for every \$1 they invest on health and wellness. Fitness programs have reduced employer healthcare costs by 20 percent to 55 percent, and reducing one health risk increases productivity by 9 percent and absenteeism by 2 percent.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that physically active people save \$330 per year in direct medical expenditures.

Cardiovascular disease continues to be the nation's leading cause of death, with direct and indirect costs estimated to be \$475.3 billion. The savings that individuals can attribute to regular exercise not only impact their own wallets, but also those of the nation and their workplace.

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About the American Heart Association

Founded in 1924, the American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to reducing disability and death from cardiovascular diseases and stroke. These diseases, America's No. 1 and No. 3 killers, claim over 864,000 lives a year. In fiscal year 2005-06 the association invested more than \$473 million in research, professional and public education, advocacy and community service programs to help all Americans live longer, healthier lives. To learn more, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit www.americanheart.org.

About Start!

Start! is the American Heart Association's national initiative that calls on Americans and their employers to create a culture of physical activity and health through walking. Start! is sponsored nationally by SUBWAY® Restaurants, Healthy Choice® and AstraZeneca. Visit www.startwalkingnow.org to download a free personal walking plan, track your physical activity online or find a walking buddy in your area.

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(587 KB)

About Us

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