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DEATHS ATTRIBUTED TO POOR DIET AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY CONTINUE TO RISE

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According to a study published this spring in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, the poor diet and sedentary behavior typical of many Americans is exacting a high price. Mokdad et al. report in the March 10, 2004 issue that about 50% of deaths in the U.S. are attributed to a limited number of largely preventable behaviors. While tobacco use was the top mortality risk factor in 2000, accounting for 18.1% of deaths, the contribution of poor diet and physical inactivity, accounting for 16.6% of deaths, was a close second.¹ Taken together, smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity account for about one-third of all deaths in the U.S. The authors express disappointment that such trends were observed a decade ago, with little if any effect and conclude:

The burden of chronic diseases is compounded by the aging effects of the baby boomer generation and the concomitant increased cost of illness at a time when health care spending continues to outstrip growth in the gross domestic product of the United States. In ancient times, Hippocrates stated that "the function of protecting and developing health must rank even above that of restoring it when it is impaired." The findings in this study argue persuasively for the need to establish a more preventive orientation in health care and public health systems in the United States.

References

1. Mokdad AH, Marks JS, Stroup DF, et al. Actual causes of death in the United States, 2000. *JAMA*. 2004;291(10):1238-1245.



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