

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Cardiovascular Disease in At-Risk Adults

Finds evidence of benefit in behavioral counseling for adults who are overweight or obese and have at least one risk factor for heart disease or stroke

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 13, 2014 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation and draft evidence review recommending overweight and obese adults who have at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease be offered or referred to behavioral counseling interventions to promote a healthy diet and physical activity for cardiovascular disease prevention. This is a B recommendation. The Task Force is seeking comments from the public on this draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review until June 9. All comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final recommendation and final evidence summary.

Cardiovascular disease, which includes heart disease and stroke, is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. Nearly half of all adults have at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and being a current smoker. In 2012, approximately 35 percent of adults were obese, which increases their risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

“The good news for adults who are overweight or obese and at increased risk for cardiovascular disease is that intensive behavioral counseling interventions, with the goal of improving diet and increasing physical activity, can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease,” says Task Force member Sue Curry, Ph.D. “While the interventions themselves vary, the effective counseling services include education, goal setting, and ongoing monitoring and feedback and are delivered by a trained professional. While there is no magic number of sessions, it is clear that effective counseling is delivered over multiple sessions spread over several months to a year.”

This draft recommendation applies specifically to adults who are obese or overweight and who already have a known risk factor for cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, pre-diabetes, or metabolic syndrome. The Task Force has a separate recommendation for people who are at average risk for cardiovascular disease. This new draft recommendation complements, but does not replace, that recommendation.

“All individuals, regardless of their risk of heart disease, can realize the health benefits of improved nutrition, healthy eating behaviors, and increased physical activity,” says Task Force member Mark Ebell M.D., M.S.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from May 13 to June 9 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

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