

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommends 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. – August 26, 2014 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published its final recommendation statement and final evidence summary on behavioral counseling to prevent cardiovascular disease in at-risk adults. The USPSTF recommends that adults who are overweight or obese and who also 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 to help prevent the disease. This is a B recommendation.

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 blood pressure, high cholesterol, being obese or overweight, or being a current smoker. About 70 percent of all adults in the United States are overweight or obese, which increases their risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

For adults who are overweight or obese and have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or high blood sugar, the evidence shows that intensive behavioral counseling interventions to improve diet and increase physical activity can help reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease.

“By following the recommended interventions, patients can experience health benefits, such as lower blood pressure and cholesterol, thus decreasing their risk for heart disease and stroke,” says Task Force member Sue Curry, Ph.D. “The most effective interventions vary, but typically involve a trained counselor who provides education, helps patients set goals, shares tools to help promote healthy behaviors, and regularly monitors and follows up with patients.” Counselors can include dietitians or nutritionists, health educators, psychologists, physiotherapists or exercise professionals, or other trained professionals.

This recommendation applies specifically to adults who are obese or overweight and who already have a known risk factor for cardiovascular disease. The Task Force issued a separate recommendation in 2012 for people at average risk for cardiovascular disease, recommending that health care professionals selectively counsel these people to encourage healthy lifestyle choices that can help prevent cardiovascular disease. This recommendation is intended to complement, not replace, the 2012 recommendation. The Task Force also has a recommendation on screening for and managing obesity, which focuses on weight loss.

“Cardiovascular disease prevention is most effective when diet and physical activity are improved together,” says Task Force member Mark Ebell, M.D., M.S. “Regardless of their risk for cardiovascular disease, everyone can experience the health benefits of improved nutrition, healthy eating behaviors, and increased physical activity.”

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement has been published online in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement is also available. A draft recommendation was available for public comment from May 13 to June 9, 2014.

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.

Contact: Ana Fullmer at Newsroom@USPSTF.net / (202) 350-6668