

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Behavioral Counseling to Promote a Healthy Lifestyle in Adults With Cardiovascular Risk Factors

Task Force recommends counseling for healthy diet and physical activity to help people at risk for cardiovascular disease stay healthy

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 12, 2020 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on behavioral counseling interventions to promote a healthy diet and physical activity for cardiovascular disease prevention in adults with cardiovascular risk factors. Based on its review of the evidence, the Task Force recommends that clinicians offer interventions that promote a healthy diet and physical activity to help people at risk for cardiovascular disease stay healthy. **This is a B recommendation.**

Grade in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

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Cardiovascular disease, which includes heart disease and stroke, is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. This draft recommendation applies to people with specific cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure and unhealthy cholesterol levels. It also applies to adults who have a combination of risk factors.

“Almost half of all adults in the U.S. have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol, but the good news is there are steps people can take to reduce their risk,” says Task Force member Marti Kubik, Ph.D., R.N. “Evidence shows that behavioral counseling interventions to improve diet and increase physical activity can help reduce cardiovascular disease.”

Counseling to promote a healthy diet focuses on increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy, lean proteins, and oils. Physical activity counseling focuses on promoting any activity that enhances or maintains overall physical fitness. Interventions typically involve about 12 individual or group counseling sessions over 6 to 18 months, for a total of about six hours. These sessions include a trained counselor who provides education, helps people set goals, shares strategies, and stays in regular contact.

“There are a variety of interventions available that promote a healthy diet and physical activity. A healthy diet and physical activity are the foundations of a plan to help people at risk for cardiovascular disease stay healthy,” says Task Force member John Epling, M.D., M.S.Ed. “Clinicians should work with their patients to determine which interventions are best for them.”

Adults with other cardiovascular disease risk factors, like diabetes, smoking or obesity, are not included in this recommendation. Interventions to reduce their cardiovascular disease risk are covered by other Task Force recommendations and are available on the Task Force website.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from May 12, 2020 to June 8, 2020 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm.

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.

Dr. Kubik is the director of the Department of Nursing at the Temple University College of Public Health and the David R. Devereaux endowed professor in nursing. From 2015 to 2018, she was a standing member of the National Institutes of Health's Community-level Health Promotion Study Section. In November 2018, Dr. Kubik was inducted as a fellow in the American Academy of Nurses.

Dr. Epling is a professor of family and community medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. He is the medical director of research for family and community medicine, is the medical director of employee health and wellness for the Carilion Clinic and maintains an active clinical primary care practice.

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