

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

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – November 24, 2020 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published a final 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 or refer adults at risk for cardiovascular disease to interventions that promote a healthy diet and physical activity to help people 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 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.

“Behavioral counseling interventions aimed at improving diet and increasing physical activity can help prevent cardiovascular disease,” says Task Force member Marti Kubik, Ph.D., R.N. “Because almost half of all adults in the U.S. have at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease, it is good news that there are effective interventions available that clinicians can offer or refer patients to that reduce risk.”

Counseling to promote a healthy diet focuses on increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, 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 6 hours.

“Interventions to promote a healthy diet and physical activity vary, but typically involve a professional who provides education, helps people set goals, shares strategies, and stays in regular contact to provide support,” says Task Force member John Epling, M.D., M.S.Ed. “People at high risk should talk to their primary care clinician about interventions that can help.”

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 addressed in other Task Force recommendations and are available on the Task Force website. All individuals, regardless of their cardiovascular disease risk, can benefit from healthy eating and physical activity.

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement and corresponding evidence summary have been posted online in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, as well as on the Task Force website at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A draft version of the recommendation statement and evidence review were available for public comment from May 12, 2020, to June 8, 2020.

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 a professor and director of the School of Nursing, College of Health and Human Services at George Mason University. She is a nurse scientist, active researcher, and past standing member on the National Institutes of Health's Community-Level Health Promotion Study Section. She is an advanced practice nurse and fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

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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