

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation on Behavioral Counseling to Promote a Healthy Lifestyle in Adults Without Cardiovascular Risk Factors

Healthcare professionals should talk to their patients to decide together if counseling interventions for healthy diet and physical activity might help prevent heart attack and stroke.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – July 26, 2022 – 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 without risk factors. The Task Force recommends that healthcare professionals decide together with their patients who do not have risk factors for cardiovascular disease whether counseling interventions on healthy diet and physical activity might help to prevent heart attack and stroke. **This is a C grade.**

Grade in this recommendation:

C: The recommendation depends on the patient's situation.

[Learn more here](#)

Cardiovascular disease, which includes heart attack and stroke, is the number one killer of adults in the United States. This recommendation applies to adults who do not have any known risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol levels, and high blood sugar. This recommendation does not apply to people who have obesity; the USPSTF has a separate related recommendation for people who have obesity.

“Behavioral counseling interventions to promote a healthy lifestyle can help prevent heart attacks and strokes for some people without cardiovascular disease risk factors,” says Task Force member Lori Pbert, Ph.D. “It’s important that healthcare professionals and patients have a conversation that is guided by professional judgment and patient preferences, such as a person’s interest in making changes to their diet and physical activity, to decide together if counseling interventions may be right for them.”

Counseling interventions involve a trained professional delivering dietary and/or physical activity guidance in the clinical setting, either in-person, virtually, or using other methods of communication. Dietary counseling focuses on increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy oils. Physical activity counseling focuses on activities that enhance or maintain overall health and physical fitness, such as walking.

“When determining which patients might benefit from counseling interventions, healthcare professionals should consider the patient’s goals and motivations, activity, and ability,” says Task Force member Michael Cabana, M.D., M.A., M.P.H. “With many people facing barriers to eating healthy and physical activity, we encourage healthcare professionals to ask those patients who may benefit from counseling about their individual circumstances, including availability of healthy food and exercise opportunities.”

Importantly, this recommendation is not for people who have known cardiovascular risk factors, such as high blood pressure and unhealthy cholesterol levels. The Task Force has a separate B grade recommendation on behavioral counseling interventions for adults who have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, which can be found on the [Task Force website](#). Everyone, regardless of risk factors, can improve their health by eating a healthy diet and participating in physical activity.

The Task Force's final recommendation statement and corresponding evidence summary have been published online in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, as well as on the Task Force website at: <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A draft version of the recommendation statement and evidence review were available for public comment from January 18, 2022, to February 14, 2022.

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

Dr. Pbert is a professor in the Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, associate chief of the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine, and founder and director of the Center for Tobacco Treatment Research & Training at the UMass Chan Medical School.

Dr. Cabana is a general pediatrician and professor of pediatrics and the chair of the Department of Pediatrics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He is also the physician-in-chief at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore.

Contact: USPSTF Media Coordinator at Newsroom@USPSTF.net / (301) 951-9203