

Recommendations on Exercise, Nutrition, and Prevention of Skin Cancer: Summary of Round 1 Interviews.

This document summarizes the findings of nine in-depth interviews conducted July 29th to August 1st, 2003. The interviews covered respondent awareness of recommendations in three areas of health: 1) physical activity and exercise, 2) diet and nutrition, and 3) prevention of skin cancer. The interviews also addressed how participants respond to new recommendations in these areas, and whether they've heard or seen conflicting recommendations. Finally, we asked respondents to indicate the sources they viewed as most credible in each of these areas.

The table below provides a simple demographic description of each participant.

| AGE | GENDER | RACE | EDUC |
|-----|--------|-------|----------------------|
| 57 | M | Asian | College Grad |
| 67 | F | White | Some college/voc.ed. |
| 42 | F | Black | Some college/voc.ed. |
| 22 | F | Black | Some college/voc.ed. |
| 24 | F | White | Some college/voc.ed. |
| 50 | F | White | Some college/voc.ed. |
| 56 | M | White | College Grad |
| 30 | M | White | Some college/voc.ed. |
| 57 | F | White | High School |

The interviews adhered to a structured protocol prepared by Westat and NCI staff prior to the interviews. The questions of greatest interest to NCI are shown below. Participants' responses to each question have been summarized as a group, and are presented in italics.

Awareness of Recommendations

Now I'm going to ask you what the recommendations are on certain things. We want to know about recommendations you've actually heard or seen, not your opinion or guesses. If you don't know what the recommendations are, that's fine - don't hesitate to tell me. Let's talk about physical activity and exercise first.

[NOTE: "Recommendations" can be anything they have heard or seen, from any source]

1. What is the recommended minimum number of days per week an average adult should be physically active to get at least some health benefit from it

Participants had heard a variety of recommendations: 5 days (4 participants), 3 days (3 participants), 6 days and 7 days (1 person each). Sources they cited for the recommendations included the health section of the newspaper, magazines, friends, a school health class, and Weight Watchers.

2. What is the recommended minimum length of time (in minutes) one needs to be physically active to get some health benefits?

Just over half of participants (5) gave answers of 30-45 minutes. Two persons said an hour. One said 20 minutes, and one said 20-30 minutes. Sources cited for this information were very similar to those noted above.

3. What types of physical activity or exercise are recommended to get some health benefits? (Can you provide some examples?)

Walking was the most common answer, being mentioned by 6 participants. Two persons referred to “cardiovascular” activities, and they mentioned aerobic dance and running as examples. Two persons mentioned biking. Also mentioned were swimming, aerobics, rollerblading, kayaking, flexibility, “small weights for muscle strength,” and “weight-bearing” exercises (explained as “using the large muscles”).

4. Have you heard or seen any (other) recommendations regarding physical activity or exercise? (If so, what are they?)

Most participants said no. But one added biking, running, and swimming here. One mentioned taking the stairs rather than the elevator, and parking further away than necessary from one’s destination in order to have further to walk. Two also mentioned doing housework.

Now let's talk about the recommendations you may have heard regarding diet and nutrition. Again, if you don't know the recommendations on these, that's fine – just let me know that.

5. What is the recommended number of fruits and vegetables the average adult should eat per day?

Just over half the participants (5) answered 5 (2 of them mentioned the "5 a day" phrase). Another person specified 2-3 of each. One person answered 4, one said 2, and one said she did not know. Sources cited for this information included "the media," TV, advertising, an infomercial (for a juicer), product labels, health magazines, a doctor, and a roommate.

One of the persons who was aware of the "5 a day" recommendation actually thinks the recommendation is now eight. She thinks she has gotten this from "more health-conscious articles....not the mainstream."

6. How much fat should a person eat per day (either in grams of fat, or percentage of calories from fat)?

Five participants said they did not know. One said "30-40%," one said "20% or less," one said 65-70 grams. Finally, one said that "5 grams rings a bell."

7. Have you heard or seen any (other) recommendations about diet and nutrition? (If so, what are they?)

Three people mentioned they had heard about the Atkins diet. One described it as saying "eat as much fat as you want," while another said it is about "cutting down on carbs." Two participants mentioned eating fiber, and two mentioned drinking lots of water. Also mentioned were: 3 cups of milk per day (for calcium), eating seafood (esp. salmon), nonfat dairy products, unsaturated fats from fish and nuts, and avoiding red meats and "transfats" (hydrogenated fats such as in margarine).

Two participants answered that they had not heard or seen any other recommendations.

Now, let's talk about recommendations for people who want to reduce or maintain their weight.

8. If someone wants to maintain their current weight, what is the recommended number of calories per day that they should eat?

Most participants (7) answered that they did not know this. One answered 2000-2,5000 calories per day, and another said that it was 2000.

9. What specific changes should people make if they want to significantly reduce their weight?

Exercise was the most frequent answer (six persons). Most also mentioned dietary changes, with three mentioning reduction in calories. Others offered reducing portion sizes, reducing fat intake, "eating moderately," eating more fruits and vegetables, less sugar, less junk food, and drinking water.

PROBE AS NECESSARY:

- To lose a lot of weight, do people need to do both exercise and change their eating patterns or diet or can they just do one of these behaviors? (If so, which one?) (If both, is one more important than the other?)

All nine participants answered that people do should do both exercise and change their eating patterns. Six said they are equally important. One said exercise is more important and another said changing diet is more important.

- Do they have to do certain activities? What have you heard, if anything, about moderate versus vigorous activities, for people trying to lose weight? How often should these activities be done?

A variety of responses were obtained here. Three participants mentioned cardiovascular/aerobic activities. A couple of persons answered walking. A couple of persons mentioned that there were not specific activities recommended for losing weight. At least one person said he did not know.

Three persons said they did not know anything about recommendations for moderate versus vigorous activities. Two person said that moderate is better than vigorous, while another person took the opposite view. Two persons said one should start out with moderate activities and work up to vigorous activities.

- Are there certain foods or nutrients they should eat? (If so, what are they? How much?)

Fruits and vegetables were the most common response, both mentioned by 4-5 participants. Also mentioned were fiber, water, grains, brown rice and barley, supplements, and fresh (“nonprepared”) foods. One person just answered “a wide spectrum,” noting that persons losing weight should eat “a balanced meal.”

- Are there certain foods they should avoid? (Is so, which ones?)

A variety of answers were given here, although foods high in fat seemed to be a common theme. A couple specifically stated that foods high in fat should be avoided, while others gave examples such as potato chips, fast food, processed snack foods, pizza, ice cream, fried foods, butter, eggs, whole milk, sweets or candy, “simple carbs,” and meats.

- Do they need to reduce their total calories or fat intake? (By how much?)

Participants clearly realized that total calories or fat intake needs to be reduced in order to lose weight. But at least half could not say by how much. Two persons noted that the amount of reduction needed would depend on circumstances: one explained that it depends on how much weight you want to lose, and another said it depends on the number of calories they are eating to begin with. Another said the reduction should be at least half – she based this on the reduction in portion sizes recommended by Weight Watchers (who she noted do not actually make recommendations in terms of calories and fat).

10. If a person lost a significant amount of weight, what should they do to prevent them from gaining the weight back? Think here of the recommendations for the prevention of gaining the weight back.

PROBE AS NECESSARY:

- Do they need to continue with the same routine they followed for losing the weight, go back to their usual diet, or something different? (What should be different?)

Most participants said that the routine for losing the weight should be maintained. One person said they do not need to exercise as much as when they were trying to lose weight. One person did not know.

Finally, let's see what you know about recommendations you may have seen or heard for preventing skin cancer. Again, if you don't the answer to any of these, that is fine, just let me know.

11. What is the recommended SPF number in sunscreen that you should use to prevent skin cancer?

A variety of answers were given here. Three persons said 15 (though one noted it would be 30 for people for those with sensitive skin), and three others said 30 or more. One answered 8, and two persons said they did not know. Sources cited for the information included television," the media," a dermatologist, product labels, and a family member.

12. What hours or times of day are recommended for staying out of the sun to prevent skin cancer?

Four participants said that this begins at noon, while three persons said 10 AM, and one said 11 AM. Three persons said it extends until 4 PM, two until 3 PM, two until 2 PM, and one until 5 PM. Three persons initially answered "mid-day," and one said he had not heard anything regarding specific hours. Also, one who answered "10 to 3" indicated it was not based on any recommendation she had heard or seen.

13. What (other) strategies are recommended for preventing skin cancer?

Five participants mentioned wearing a hat. Two mentioned wearing long-sleeved clothing, and two mentioned wearing light-colored clothing (e.g., white shirts). Also mentioned were using an umbrella, walking on the shady side of the street. One (whose father had died from skin cancer) said that if you have any moles you should watch them to see if they are growing, and have them checked every 6 months (she sees a dermatologist regularly).

14. As far as you know, do people with dark skin tones need to protect themselves from skin cancer?

Most participants answered yes. Another said she assumes so, but she hadn't heard anything about this. Two said they did not know.

Reactions to Recommendations

15. In general, what do you do, if anything, when you hear a *new* recommendation regarding physical activity or exercise?

Four participants indicated they would be inclined to ignore a new recommendation on this. Two of these persons explained that they feel that what they are doing is right, though one noted she might pay attention if it is stated that a study has found something, and another noted it would depend on the recommendation and the source. One noted that that “there are so many conflicting reports on TV.”

Other participants noted that they would wait for more information about the recommendation. For example, one said he would want to see multiple sources making the same recommendation. He also stated that he’s more impressed hearing that the recommendation stems from studies done over a period of time, and that it comes from the government or a medical association. A couple of persons said that they would talk to others about the new recommendation to help them evaluate it (one specifically mentioned her doctor).

A couple of participants noted they would evaluate whether or not the recommendation is something that it feasible for them to do. As one put it: “In general, my view is ‘do what you can’....everybody is not going to be able to do everything that is recommended.”

16. Recommendations about exercise/physical activity can change over time, and different organizations may put out messages or recommendations that don’t necessarily agree with one another. Can you think of any *conflicting or confusing* recommendations you have heard about exercise/physical activity? (What were they? What was your reaction to this?)

Answers included:

-Running (now said to be not as healthy as was once thought)

-Some saying moderate exercise is okay, others say only vigorous exercise has a benefit.

-The “No pain, no gain” slogan is now known to be untrue – walking is great exercise.

-Different lengths of time for exercise: as little as 10 minutes, as much as an hour.

-One person just talked about how jogger who wrote a book on the benefits of running only to die young from a heart attack, whereas George Burns smoked cigars and lived many years.

Few participants voiced a reaction to conflicting recommendations. Two persons indicated it has made them skeptical about recommendations. As one put it: "I just listen to myself....I can tell if I've had a good workout and I can tell if I haven't had a good workout." Another (who noted the conflicting recommendation on moderate versus vigorous activities) said that if someone can only do moderate exercise, then that is good enough. Some others simply do not attend closely to any recommendations.

17. Let's say you hear on the news, it is now recommended that you do one hour of physical activity per day, instead of 30 minutes. What would your reaction be? (Would you change your current behavior in any way? If so, how would you change it?)

Participants said they would NOT be inclined to change their current behavior in any way. Participants currently exercising for less than an hour seemed to feel that they are doing fine as is. One noted that her doctor had recommended 20 minutes for her. Another explained that there are so many recommendations, "so why should I pick one over the other?" However, this respondent did say that if he heard the new recommendation from multiple sources, he would try to change.

18. In general, what do you do, if anything, when you hear a new recommendation regarding diet and nutrition?

Participants had a variety of responses. Two persons indicated they would pay more attention to new recommendations about diet and nutrition, as compared to exercise. One of these persons explained that he tries "to be on the safe side" when it comes to nutrition and wants to follow new recommendations. Three indicated that they would need to receive more information about the recommendation in order to evaluate it. Two participants said they would try the new recommendation as long as they liked the food being recommended. For example, one discussed how she had read that cantaloupe is very good for you, and since she and her husband like cantaloupe they now eat more of it. Finally, two persons said they do nothing in response to a new recommendation – one justified it by pointing to the conflicting information she has heard about the level of cholesterol in eggs.

19. Can you think of any *conflicting or confusing* recommendations you have heard about diet and nutrition? (What were they? What was your reaction to this?)

Answers included:

-Nuts were once said to not be good for you, but now it is said that a small amount of nuts can help prevent disease.

-Friends say don't eat too much meat and avoid cheese, but her health class in school taught her that these things are important for protein.

-It is now said that eggs are not as high in cholesterol as previously stated.

-Pork – once told to stay away from it, and then it's "the other white meat."

-Atkins diet contrasts with other recommendations about meat and carbs (mentioned by three respondents)

-Once heard that eating foods cooked over charcoal could cause cancer, but then heard it wasn't true.

-Grapefruits said to be very healthy to eat – but now it's said they can interact with certain medications.

The participant who discussed the conflicting recommendations about nuts said that he responded positively to the new recommendation, and he now eats a small amount of nuts every day. One respondent said she pulls what suits her from conflicting recommendations: "I take from each one what I think is good for me." Another person noted that all the conflicting recommendations she has heard are confusing and has made her skeptical of dietary recommendations. A few respondents do not pay a lot of attention to recommendations anyway, thus they have no real reactions to the conflicting recommendations they may have heard.

20. Let's say you hear on the news, it is now recommended that little or none of your diet should be eaten as carbohydrates, instead of most of your diet as carbohydrates. What would your reaction be? (Would you change your current behavior in any way, or no? If so, how would you change it?)

Most participants indicated this recommendation would have little impact on them. At least five would essentially ignore it. Among the others, one said she'd talk to her doctor first and otherwise she would "take it with a grain of salt." Another said it would take "more than a one-shot announcement" for him to believe the recommendation. One participant noted he might reduce his carbohydrates, but the

notion of eating no carbohydrates would not make any sense to him. Another respondent appeared to have her mind made up on the matter already, saying it would depend on the type of carbohydrate: “If it’s a whole food, I would ignore what they said. If it’s the whites, I would agree.”

21. Can you think of any *conflicting or confusing* recommendations you have heard about skin cancer prevention or about the best ways to protect yourself from the sunburn? (What were they? What was your reaction to this?)

No one indicated that they had heard conflicting or confusing recommendations about how to protect oneself from skin cancer. But one African-American participant discussed how her friends believe that they do not need to use “SPF” due to their dark skin, though she learned on a TV show this wasn’t true.

22. Let’s say you hear on the news that it is now recommended you wear a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or more, instead of 15. What would your reaction be? (Would you change your current behavior in any way, or no? How would you change it?)

- Would you buy a new sunscreen with an SPF of 30?
- Would you first finish using the sunscreen you have?
- Would cost be an issue in your decision to use a sunscreen with a higher SPF?

Most participants were not asked this question, since they either did not currently use a sunscreen at all, or else they already used a sunscreen with an SPF of 30. One participant (who wears only a face cream with an SPF) said that she would buy one with an SPF of 30, and that if it costs more, she would still buy it. She would finish using her current face cream first though. Another said she would not change – she doesn’t attend much to recommendations and she doesn’t feel she’s out in the sun enough to worry about it (even though she reported earlier that she sunbathes by her backyard pool every weekend). Finally, one participant said he might change his behavior, but only over a period of time – he would have to perceive it as not just being a fad.

Credibility of Sources

There's just one more topic we'd like to discuss with you. People can get information and recommendations for the health issues we've covered here from many different places – different organizations, different individuals, television and radio programs, newspapers and magazines, and so on. We'd like to know if you have any opinions about who provides reliable and trustworthy recommendations.

23. First, think about physical activity and exercise – who do you think provides reliable and trustworthy information about this? (What is it about these sources that make you feel that the information from them is reliable and trustworthy?)

Participants had a variety of responses. Three persons viewed their doctor as the most credible source of information on this. Another person pointed to “alternative health practitioners” because they “talk about how if you do things right, you won't get sick” (this same person said that traditional doctors are “stupid,” having been taught the wrong things). One person suggested the American Medical Association, but he assumes that this organization does its own research: “they've done their own studies so they must know what's going on.”

Four persons pointed to sources from which they would read recommendations, such as health or fitness magazines, or health-related web sites. One persons explained that by reading, you get “more background” behind the recommendation, noting that TV and radio tend to be “more sensational.” This same person said he doesn't really consider the organization putting out the recommendation – it's more important that it appear in a “reputable” publication, such as the Washinton Post.

Finally, one participant indicated that personal trainers or athletes are the most credible sources – “It is something they do...on a daily basis....They have seen what works and what doesn't work.”

24. Now think about diet and nutrition – who do you think provides reliable and trustworthy information about this? (What is it about these sources that make you feel that the information from them is reliable and trustworthy?)

Three persons cited the same sources for diet and nutrition that they did for exercise (alternative health practitioners, health-related web sites, and reading reputable publications). Another (who referred to the AMA previously) pointed to the American Dietetic Association. It turned out he thinks both of these are federal government organizations that conduct research, stating: “I would think they've done enough studies that their recommendations would be on the money.”

Other sources cited include:

-Discovery and health channels on TV – the information is usually “based on what some doctor said.”

-Doctors, nutritionists, and the news – “They have done their research....we are supposed to believe them. We’re supposed to trust them.”

-Nutrition books – “They come from nutritionists.”

One participant said she did not know who provides credible information about diet and nutrition, citing the fact that she perceives so much conflicting information: “because you read so many things one time, ‘this is good for you’ [and] six months later ‘now it’s not good for you’.”

25. Now think about skin cancer prevention – who do you think provides reliable and trustworthy information about this? (What is it about these sources that make you feel that the information from them is reliable and trustworthy?)

Again, participants cited a wide variety of sources they viewed as credible:

-American Cancer Society – “I don’t think they’re influenced by any other industry...to slant their opinions.”

-Magazine such as Prevention – because they are focused on prevention of disease.

-“Oh anybody.” But she discussed an alternative health practitioner who sunbathes a lot and never uses sunscreen. This person “has no fear of getting skin cancer because of what she eats.”

-Companies that make sunscreen – The participant said she didn’t know what kind of research they do, but “they have been big corporations for a long time.”

-Dermatologists, doctors.

-Discovery and health channels on TV

-Health-related web sites

26. Have you ever seen information or recommendations on any of these topics from a source you didn't feel you could trust? (What source? What made them untrustworthy?)

A few of the participants noted that they have received information from friends and it is often not to be trusted. As one put it: "They just repeat that they hear from other people." One admitted that information he's gotten from friends probably has some real value, yet sees them as following fad diets (specifically, the Atkins diet). Another discussed how he wants to get the background of the recommendation, and this is not obtained from a friend's recommendation.

A couple of persons emphasized that recommendations are often made in order to help sell products: "Everybody's making a buck...some of it's true, but they want people to believe all of it's true."

Earlier in the interview, one participant (the one with a fondness for alternative health practitioners) suggested that dietary recommendations from the ADA are not accurate. She said the organization probably wants to recommend 8 fruits and vegetables a day, but is "afraid" to do so because they don't want to contradict what they've said in the past. Another reason would be that "they don't want to scare people because they eat so miserably."