Chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, are leading causes of death, disability, and health care costs in Utah and the United States. Chronic diseases are often considered a normal part of aging, but the risks of several chronic diseases can be reduced substantially by lifestyle choices, such as a healthy diet, exercise, and not smoking. The Utah Department of Health recently surveyed Utahns to assess their knowledge of chronic diseases, their knowledge of the lifestyles and behaviors that can help prevent those diseases, and the lifestyle and behavioral choices those Utahns had made themselves. That survey indicated that:

- Utahns rated heart disease and cancer as the diseases of most concern for their own health, but 38% of Utahns did not either identify heart disease or cancer as the most common cause of death for Utahns.
- Utahns rated exercise and a healthy diet as the health behaviors that are most important to their health.
- Utahns reported a lower smoking rate than any other state in 1996.
- Only about a quarter of Utahns reported regular exercise.
- Over two thirds of Utahns reported a low fat diet, but only one in five Utahns reported exercising at least 5 times per week or eating at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables each day.
- Utahns were more likely to report getting regular exercise or maintaining a healthy diet (low in fat and with at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables daily).
- Utahns who rated heart disease as most important were more likely to report a healthy diet, but only slightly more likely to report regular exercise.
- Utahns were more likely to maintain a low fat diet than either regular exercise or eating at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables each day.
- Even among Utahns who reported that exercise and a healthy diet were important, only 31% reported healthy levels of exercise (5+ times per week for 30 minutes at any intensity) and only 22% reported eating at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables each day.

Utahns’ Beliefs about Healthy Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage of Utahns (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise*</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Diet**</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Smoking</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage stress</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate rest</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain ideal weight</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay active</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid excess drinking</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See doctor</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge but Not Action

- Exercise: 82.3% reported it as important, but only 28.7% reported practicing it.
- Avoid smoking: 90.6% reported it as important, but only 48.1% reported practicing it.
- Healthy diet: 70.6% reported it as important, but only 31.8% reported practicing it.

How Health Beliefs Affect Health Behaviors

- Exercise: 30.9% of Utahns who reported it as important also reported practicing it.
- Low Fat: 53.2% of Utahns who reported it as important also reported practicing it.
- 5-A-Day: 18.7% of Utahns who reported it as important also reported practicing it.

Utahns have lower death rates for many chronic diseases than elsewhere in the United States. Healthy behaviors, especially avoiding tobacco use, contribute to the good health of Utahns. However, Utahns have substantial room for improvement in other areas, such as diet and exercise. Utahns are generally aware of the importance of chronic diseases and of the health behaviors that are most important to prevent those diseases. However, knowledge alone is not enough. Many Utahns are not taking advantage of proven ways to improve their health, despite that knowledge.
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Additional information about this topic is available from the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control, Utah Department of Health, P O Box 142107, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2107, (801) 538-6186, FAX (801) 538-9495, or email: ilarsen@doh.state.ut.us or from the Office of Public Health Data, (801) 538-6108, FAX (801) 538-7053, or email: phdata@doh.state.ut.us.

Methods:

The data for this report came primarily from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). BRFSS is an ongoing survey of health behaviors of Utah adults (age 18 and over). It is supported by CDC and conducted in all states.

For this study, six additional questions were added to the BRFSS interviews conducted during April through June of 1996. The interview results from 717 individuals were weighted to the age and sex distribution of Utah adults in 1996.

For more information on BRFSS, contact John Librett at 538-6263.