Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at Veritas Risk Services

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TOP 10 CAUSES OF DEATH IN THE U.S.

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The following is a list of the leading causes of death in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the steps you can take to prevent them.

1. Heart Disease

More than 600,000 people die of heart disease each year—making it the leading cause of death in the United States. Heart disease is caused by a buildup of plaque in the inner walls of the arteries, which slows or blocks the flow of blood to the heart. Your risk of developing heart disease increases if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or type 2 diabetes, or if you smoke or are obese.

Prevention—Thankfully, there are simple steps you can take now to promote heart health, like maintaining a healthy weight and exercising frequently. Following a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol and limiting your sodium to 1,500 to 2,400 milligrams per day can also help. In addition, schedule preventive visits with your primary care doctor, so you can catch heart issues early, before they become more severe.

2. Cancer

Every year, nearly 2 million people are diagnosed with some type of cancer, and 580,000 people die of the disease. There are more than 100 types of cancer, but the three most common are prostate cancer, breast cancer and lung cancer.

Prevention—While cancer can't always be prevented, there are steps you can take to prevent certain types of cancer. For instance, smokers are 30 times more likely to develop lung cancer than nonsmokers, so by avoiding tobacco, you can significantly reduce your chances of developing lung cancer.

Early detection is key to winning the battle against cancer. Follow screening recommendations from your doctor and seek diagnostic follow-up and treatment as needed.

3. Chronic lower respiratory diseases

Chronic lower respiratory diseases, primarily chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), kill more than 149,000 people each year. COPD is a lung disease in which the airways are partially obstructed, making it difficult to breathe. More than 15 million people have COPD. However, because symptoms develop slowly over time, experts believe that the number of people affected could be much higher.

Prevention—Not smoking is the most effective way to keep your lungs healthy. By avoiding secondhand smoke and reducing your exposure to lung irritants like pollution and dust, you can decrease the likelihood of developing COPD and other chronic lower respiratory diseases.

4. Accidents

More than 130,000 people die from unintentional injuries each year. The leading causes of accident-related deaths are from falling, motor vehicles, unintentional poisoning and drowning.

Prevention—While it's impossible to prevent all accidents, there are steps you can take to reduce the likelihood that they will occur. For instance, use a hands-free device if you plan on talking on the phone and avoid texting while driving and driving in inclement weather. Keep poisons out of reach of children, practice ladder safety, and always monitor children when they're swimming (even if a lifeguard is present).

5. Stroke

A stroke most often occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked by a clot. Approximately 128,000 people die from strokes each year, and it is one of the leading causes of long-term disability. Common risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes and obesity. While strokes most often happen to the elderly, 25 percent of all strokes occur in those under the age of 65.

Prevention—Similar to heart disease prevention, living a healthy lifestyle is key to preventing a stroke. Maintaining a healthy weight, eating well, being active and avoiding

tobacco can help reduce your chances of having a stroke.

6. Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's is a chronic neurodegenerative disease that gradually destroys one's ability to remember, reason, imagine and learn. Alzheimer's worsens over time and early symptoms include problems with memory, thinking and judgment. More than 84,000 people die from Alzheimer's each year.

Prevention—While much is still unknown about Alzheimer's, research indicates that keeping the brain active by completing puzzles or word games may help prevent Alzheimer's. In addition, eating a healthy diet, staying socially active, exercising frequently and getting enough sleep may help stave off cognitive decline.

7. Diabetes

Approximately 29.1 million Americans have diabetes, and the rate of new cases continues to grow each year. There are two main types of diabetes: juvenile and type 2 diabetes. Left untreated, diabetes can lead to heart disease, strokes, amputations and kidney disease. Approximately 75,000 people die of diabetes each year.

Prevention—While type 1 diabetes can't be prevented, type 2 diabetes can be avoided by exercising regularly and eating nutritiously. Maintaining a healthy weight is the biggest thing you can do to prevent type 2 diabetes. If you already have diabetes, it is important that you are vigilant in monitoring your blood sugar so complications do not arise.

8. Influenza and pneumonia

The flu and pneumonia kill more than 56,000 people each year. The flu is an infection of the respiratory tract that is caused by the influenza virus. Most people recover from the flu after a few days or in less than two weeks; however, sometimes complications such as pneumonia can occur. The elderly, children younger than 5 and pregnant women are at a higher risk of developing flu-related complications.

Prevention—The easiest way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine each year. The CDC recommends that anyone over the age of 6 months gets a flu shot. In addition, cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing to limit the spread of germs. Wash your hands frequently, get plenty of sleep, and stay active to help keep your immune system healthy.

9. Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome and nephrosis

Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome and nephrosis refer to diseases of the kidney. Nephrotic syndrome, for instance, is a kidney disorder that causes your body to excrete too much protein in your urine. Kidney diseases can be caused by infections, autoimmune disorders like lupus, and also by diabetes and high blood pressure. About 47,000 people die each year of kidney diseases.

Prevention—Since having diabetes and high blood pressure puts you at a higher risk of having kidney issues, managing these conditions can help reduce your risk of developing kidney disease. In addition, keeping your immune system healthy by exercising regularly, drinking plenty of water, eating well and limiting the amount of fat and cholesterol in your diet can help keep your kidneys healthy.

10. Suicide

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, and the third leading cause of death among teenagers. Mental health disorders such as depression or substance abuse disorder (usually in combination with a mental health disorder) account for 90 percent of suicides.

Prevention—If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, talk about your feelings with someone you trust. Do not be ashamed to get help. The National Suicide Prevention Lifetime is always staffed and ready to listen at 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

What You Can Do

While environmental and genetic factors play a factor in the development of certain diseases, living a healthy lifestyle now can improve your well-being for years to come. By following the prevention tips outlined in this article, you can start living a healthier lifestyle today.

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