Know Your Health:
A Necessary Focus on Prevention
Know Your Health: A Necessary Focus on Prevention

Introduction ............................................................................................................ 3
The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act .................................................... 5
Prevention Guide: Patients ...................................................................................... 6
Annual Check-Ups: A Doctor’s Frustration............................................................. 9
Mothers and Prevention ........................................................................................ 10
Longevity and Well-Being: A Brief Prevention Guide for Aging Adults............... 11
Creating a Healthy World ...................................................................................... 14
About Healthy World ........................................................................................... 15
About TeleVox ....................................................................................................... 16
About this Study

*Know Your Health: A Necessary Focus on Prevention* is based on a survey of more than 2,200 healthcare providers representing a variety of specialties and disciplines and 1,015 Americans ages 18 and older. The research was conducted in collaboration with Kelton Research using an email invitation and an online survey format.

In the case of individuals, quotas were set to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the total U.S. population ages 18 and over. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.1 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.
When a patient receives an unwelcome diagnosis, the natural response is to consider what could have been done to prevent this illness. *What should I have done differently?*

*Does this run in my family?* Though illness may come through neglect of our own health or “bad genes,” we’re fortunate to live in a time where preventive care can avert numerous health issues. Both patients and physicians benefit from focusing on preventive care and taking advantage of education and screening opportunities before symptoms begin.

Preventive care includes age and gender specific lifestyle adjustments, vaccinations, screening tests and other measures. During this process, a physician will help the patient identify major health risk factors (such as heart disease, high cholesterol and diabetes) and work with the patient to either bring these conditions under control or to stop them from forming.

The objective of preventive care is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of patients, while reducing costs of healthcare, allowing funds to be directed to research and other patients with unpreventable needs. Preventive care may involve screening a healthy patient for cancer because it’s common in his or her family; or it could mean working with patients currently suffering from chronic health conditions, such as high blood pressure, to prevent the disease from escalating to diabetes or a stroke.
The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which passed in 2010, requires most health plans to provide preventive healthcare services to insured patients without the cost of a co-payment or deductible. Many health experts believe that preventing a serious health condition or disease through preventive care will save money in the long run. Still, millions of health consumers aren’t taking advantage of these vital wellness care benefits.

So the question for consumers remains: Does prevention really save money? Should we spend money to prevent a condition that may never develop, or should we wait it out, possibly become ill or chronic and spend more money treating the condition in the long run?

Most feel that the economy will see the benefits of preventive care when it is targeted at patients who are most likely to suffer from a chronic condition — those with a history of family illness and the elderly. That said, cost and convenience remain the most significant decision criteria for U.S. healthcare consumers. The cost of any service can sway the decision of whether or not they receive treatment, no matter the severity of the condition. Before treatment choices can be made, both doctors and patients must more specifically understand the range of benefits preventive care has to offer.
Preventive Guide: Patients

Though some U.S. healthcare consumers say that a doctor’s recommendation is one of the top reasons to seek preventive care, patients also must accept full responsibility for their own health and engage in a collaborative relationship with their physician(s).

**Keep up with annual exams.**

Healthy people typically don’t want to invest time and money in seeing a doctor for a check-up. However, studies show that a patient may recall symptoms or questions in the exam room they may otherwise have ignored. The Department of Health and Human Services reported in 2008 that 107 million people in the U.S. — almost one out of every two adults ages 18 or older — had at least one of six commonly reported, and possibly preventable, chronic illnesses: cardiovascular disease, arthritis, diabetes, cancer, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Maintaining regular wellness visits provides an opportunity for the doctor to ask pertinent questions and perform relevant tests to assess whether a patient needs treatment.

**Slow down and ask questions.**

Many patients feel guilty about asking questions because of pressure to keep their appointments short. Each healthcare visit is an irreplaceable time for both patient and doctor to investigate their state of health and decide if preventive options are warranted. Strategies, like writing down questions before the visit and recording the doctor’s suggestions while they explain the options, can be important to getting the most from each office visit.

**Know what your insurance plan covers.**

According to *Know Your Health: A Necessary Focus on Prevention*, 90 percent of insured health consumers in the U.S. report having visited a doctor in the past two years for reasons such as routine check-ups, vaccinations, or disease treatments, yet 30 percent of those surveyed said they still don’t know what their insurance policy covers in terms of preventive care. Patients who are in the dark about coverage need to seek out education from their policy providers. There may be preventive benefits — some even free to patients — that they could take advantage of immediately.
Many miss out on preventive services because they do not go to the doctor for years, do not go for the tests the doctor recommends, or are confused about which tests to ask for. They may not know that Medicare and other insurance plans cover most of the tests and shots."

— Wellness Guide to Preventive Care,
University of California Berkeley School of Public Health
Regardless of gender or age, no patient can remain completely risk-free, but they can choose to make certain healthy habits part of their daily lives. Proactive choices to eat better, quit smoking, and floss daily can add up, increasing overall wellness and easing the aging process — all while lowering healthcare spending. According to the University of California Berkeley School of Public Health, these commonsense steps can save millions in medical costs and prevent injury, disease and premature death:

- Don’t smoke, and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get regular exercise. Brisk walking for just half an hour every day can be a big factor in controlling weight and staying healthy.
- Choose a diet low in animal fat and sodium (such as leaner meats), and rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat dairy products. Eat at least two servings of fish a week.
- Keep alcohol consumption moderate: no more than one drink daily for a woman, or two drinks for a man. If you are a heavy drinker, seek counseling, and cut back or quit.
- Examine your skin on a regular basis. Any mole that changes shape, color, or size; any sore that doesn’t heal; or any persistent patch of irritated skin may be a sign of cancer and needs professional evaluation. If you’re at high risk for skin cancer or simply have lots of moles, get a professional skin exam.
- Fasten seat belts, see that kids ride in proper restraints, and obey the law. Drive defensively and only when sober.
- Brush and floss to prevent dental disease.
Doctors are increasingly concerned with the time and money it takes to perform screenings and other preventive services required by incentive programs and new mandates set forth by the healthcare reform law. Some doctors debate whether there is enough capacity to treat sick patients and support healthy people in maintaining their well-being.

One hot topic for discussion is the importance of annual exams. Laura Blue, senior contributing health writer for TIME.com, expressed her feelings on the matter in her article “Is an Annual Physical Really Necessary?” Blue wrote, “If every adult in the United States is coming in for a physical, that’s a lot of time. You lose half a day of work. That adds up as a society. [At the individual level], most patients report difficulty getting in to see their doctors in a timely manner. One of the things that could be contributing to [doctors’ lack of time] is physicals.”

With each passing decade, doctors become increasingly successful at providing patients with education and guidance during each appointment. Recent studies have shown, however, that both doctor and patient must increase their level of communication with one another to eliminate unnecessary clinic visits and hospital readmissions, making the most out of everyone’s time. In a study conducted in 2007 for the “Archives of Internal Medicine,” Ateev Mehrotra, MD, MPH, assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, found that if every patient were to have a physical, it would account for 41 percent of all doctor-patient time spent. And some patients are receiving preventive screenings in other appointments in addition to annual check-ups, making some preventive measures, such as those screenings, unnecessary or even doubled. Dr. Mehrotra also found that 80 percent of preventive care, such as cholesterol screenings and weight loss counseling, takes place during visits other than annual check-ups or gynecological visits. Though most doctors have argued that preventive exams are the only time preventive care is happening, new findings are contrary to that assumption.

Healthcare providers need to be aware of the “one size fits all” approach: All persons of X gender, over or under the age of X, receive X. Some doctors may have the intention to tailor annual checkups to the needs of each individual patient, but may lose sight of this individuality due to workload or any other daily time constraints. Doctors who prioritize personalization provide a more thorough experience for their patients. Healthcare providers that currently embrace this type of treatment are leveraging the data in electronic health records to engage patients with supportive communications via email, text, voicemail and mobile applications. Through the convergence of mobile devices, online access and electronic patient data records, physicians can now communicate more efficiently and effectively between visits, allowing time spent during annual exams to be more productive.
Mothers and Prevention

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, under the current healthcare reform law enacted in 2010, preventive care measures for women, including mammograms, screenings for cervical cancer and prenatal care, are all covered with no cost sharing for new health plans. And, in August of last year, non-grandfathered insurance plans — plans that allow policy holders to take advantage of new benefits — were required to provide coverage at no cost in the insured’s first plan year beginning on or after August 1, 2012. This coverage includes services such as well-woman visits, the screening of pregnant women for gestational diabetes, and breastfeeding support, supplies, and counseling.

“Women will be able to have access to essential preventive services that will provide early detection and screening for those situations where they’re most at risk, and also provide opportunities to care and services that they need as wives and mothers.”


Still, some women don’t currently take advantage of these benefits, perhaps because they either hold a “grandfathered” status with their previous insurance plan policies, they’re uninsured, or they don’t know which preventive care services exist or how to receive them.

According to Know Your Health: A Necessary Focus on Prevention, 80 percent of the mothers surveyed reported having health insurance, and 91 percent reported visiting a healthcare professional of some kind in the past two years. With these numbers, it’s surprising that 32 percent of mothers still said they don’t feel knowledgeable about what their health insurance policy covers for preventive care, and that 11 percent said they still had no idea what preventive care actually means. With 96 percent of healthcare consumer moms having said preventive care is important for their families, education about policy coverage, healthcare reform benefits, and clinic services must be addressed.

“Coverage for preventive services without co-payments or deductibles will make it possible for many moms to get the important preventive care and screenings that will help keep them healthy and reduce the cost of healthcare over the long haul. Moms need their well-woman visits and the full range of health screenings, including for domestic violence.”

— Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, executive director, CEO and co-founder of www.momsrising.org, on the Preventive Health Care Provision of the Affordable Care Act
Longevity and Well-Being: A Brief Prevention Guide for Aging Adults

According to the Population Reference Bureau, 79 million U.S. residents were born between 1946 and 1964, a period commonly known as the “Baby Boom.” The Pew Research Center Data Bank reported that today and every day for the next 16 years, 10,000 Baby Boomers — who make up a whopping 26 percent of our population — will turn 65. With this rapid rise in the senior population will come an increasing number of people who have chronic health issues or are at risk for diseases.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than 37 million people in the Baby Boomer population will be managing one or more chronic conditions by the year 2030. The most common chronic conditions include diabetes, arthritis, congestive heart failure and dementia. Many patients with these conditions lose the ability to live independently and must move to nursing homes where, many times, the quality of care suffers. Baby Boomers, in particular, must realize that prioritizing their preventive healthcare will help preserve their independence as well as their physical and emotional well-being.

As part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, older adults gained new benefits, such as free, annual preventive care visits and early-detection services, including mammograms. Unfortunately, these services have been under-utilized: Know Your Health: A Necessary Focus on Prevention uncovered that only 32 percent of the aging population are receiving the preventive care measures that are recommended for them. And, although 95 percent of the Baby Boomer generation said they feel preventive care is important, 26 percent reported not feeling as knowledgeable as they could be about their health insurance policy’s coverage of such care. These Boomers lack knowledge and understanding of how to receive their benefits. Consequently, doctors, policy providers and the media must continue the effort to educate aging adults on their preventive care rights and the steps they can take to live a healthy lifestyle on a daily basis.

As patients age, some assume that their health will become a higher priority, but aren’t sure what exact tests or lifestyle adjustments should occur. According to a compilation of research from the Center for Disease Control, the American Association of Retired Persons and the American Medical Association, the following screenings and preventive actions should be on every Baby Boomer’s prevention to-do list:
Get a Colorectal Screening at 50 — By screening for colorectal cancer, precancerous polyps can be detected and removed in patients before they develop into cancer. If all adults age 50 and older were screened routinely, as many as 60 percent of deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented.

Check Cholesterol — Heart disease and stroke are major causes of premature death and serious disability in persons younger than 65. Periodic cholesterol checks can decrease hospital and ambulatory services and prevent premature death from coronary heart disease.

Get the Influenza Vaccination Every Fall — Across all ages, influenza and pneumonia combined were the eighth leading cause of death recently in the U.S., contributing to more than 56,000 deaths.

Update Your Pneumococcal Vaccination — Almost 3,500 deaths each year result from pneumococcal disease, and less than half of at-risk older adults are protected against the disease.

Get Plenty of Physical Activity — Regular exercise can reduce the risk for developing depression, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer.

Quit Smoking and Drink in Moderation — Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease. Excessive drinking causes approximately 79,000 deaths annually and can contribute to many deadly conditions, including liver disease.

Watch Your Weight — Nearly 80 percent of obese adults suffer from weight-related conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol and osteoarthritis.

Monitor Your Blood Pressure — Older adults with untreated or poorly-managed hypertension (high blood pressure) increase their risk for heart disease, stroke, end-stage renal disease, peripheral artery disease, retinopathy and aortic aneurysm.

Maintain Good Oral Health — Almost all adults ages 50 to 64 have missing or filled permanent teeth, and most show signs of gum disease which is associated with diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke.
For Women:

**Receive Regular Breast Cancer Screenings** —
Women ages 40 to 64 accounted for 61 percent of all breast cancer in situ cases, 54 percent of invasive cases, and 40 percent of deaths in just one year alone. Women should have mammograms every one to two years from age 40 to 74.

**Ask Your Doctor About Cervical Cancer Screenings** — More than 50 percent of women who develop cervical cancer have never been screened, and 60 percent of those who receive a diagnosis have not been screened in the previous five years. Women ages 21 to 64 should continue receiving pap tests regularly, as this is one of the most reliable cancer screenings available. The frequency of testing will vary with age and the patient’s current health conditions.

Because guidelines on these screenings have changed over the last few years, older adults should consult with their doctors to determine the best and most current approach for each preventive action. Patients can also ask to be put on a mailing list (email, postal mail, text message or voicemail) to receive helpful reminders about preventive services such as mammograms, yearly exams and vaccinations.
Creating a Healthy World

No matter your age or gender, preventive action will not only improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs, but it will also improve quality of life and save lives. Patients want to be involved in their own care, but need the tools to stay educated, encouraged and motivated to follow through for their own health. Text messages, phone calls and emails from physicians get patients’ attention while providing this desired support and involvement.

Increasing patient communication efforts will require forward-thinking healthcare practitioners who understand that their continued involvement is critical to ensuring a healthy future for our patients. Many physicians understand that engaging patients between office visits can inspire them to embrace and build the habits to follow through with treatment plans. They know personalized, ongoing engagement can activate positive lifestyle changes that will help people lead healthy lives.
About Healthy World

A healthy world, while global by definition, actually happens one person at a time. It is driven by forward-thinking healthcare practitioners who understand their involvement is critical to ensuring a healthy population.

The Healthy World initiative, launched by TeleVox, aims at helping people — young and old — be healthy!

Three imperatives for creating a healthy world — one person at a time

1. Touch the hearts and minds of patients to drive positive behavior change.
2. Engage patients with information and encouragement between visits.
3. Activate patients to make positive behavior changes for a healthier life.

The driving force behind the goal of creating a healthy world are the healthcare professionals who take the time to engage patients with personalized, thoughtful, ongoing communications that encourage and inspire them to embrace and follow ongoing treatment plans.

They know every communication with a patient — including those that take place between office visits — is an opportunity to help that person understand the importance of good habits like nutrition, physical activity, taking their medications as prescribed and following new treatment recommendations. Engaging patients and their families between visits through proactive, relevant communications helps them to wake up and stay focused on positive behavior changes is the way to create a healthy world — one patient at a time.
About TeleVox

TeleVox is a high-tech Engagement Communications company, providing automated voice, email, text and web solutions that activate positive patient behaviors through the delivery of technology with a human touch.

Since 1992, TeleVox has been creating a comprehensive approach that breaks through and motivates people to live healthy lives. At TeleVox, we understand that touching the hearts and minds of patients by engaging with them between healthcare appointments will encourage and inspire them to follow and embrace treatment plans. We know personalized, ongoing patient engagement will activate positive lifestyle changes. TeleVox helps healthcare professionals touch, engage and activate every unique patient to lead healthy lives.

TeleVox. High-tech, human touch to create a healthy world — one patient at a time.
Our Healthy World Initiative utilizes ethnographic research to uncover, understand and interpret the patient point-of-view when it comes to managing their health. We focus on studying how people interact with healthcare providers and how they behave between doctor visits. As part of this program, TeleVox delivers research reports that provide healthcare professionals with timely insight for helping patients make healthy changes in their lives, follow treatment plans, and take accountability for improving their personal health.