



## **New Survey: More Than One-third Say the Recession is Taking a Toll on Their Health**

**By LISA STARK and KRISTINA WONG**

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The slumping economy isn't just affecting American's financial health -- it's taking a toll on physical health as well.

A [new survey from the American Heart Association](#) found nearly a third of consumers are cutting back on everything from doctor visits to fresh fruits and vegetables. More than half say the economy has affected their ability to take care of their health.

AHA president Dr. Tim Gardner said this was a disturbing trend related to the bad economy.

"They were cancelling appointments. They weren't seeing their dentist. They weren't engaging in gym activities and things like that," he said. "I would think that people would not allow healthfulness or prevention of illness be a discretionary item in their budget."

Marion Nestle, a professor at New York University and the author of "[What to Eat: An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating](#)," said a poor economy often translates into poor health.

"When people don't have money, they look for every way they can start cutting," Nestle said. "They can't cut out rent, so they cut out expensive doctor bills -- especially if they don't have health insurance, and cut out buying expensive foods."

Fatima Sanders admitted she can't always afford the best food for her children.

"She can't even get a sandwich," she said, referring to her daughter. "She has to get the chips for 75 cents."

Tamie Brian said while she's not cutting back on healthy food for her children, both she and her husband have been working extra hours in order to afford to keep her children well-nourished -- putting their own health at risk.

"The top priority is our children, so we're not going to not take them to the doctor if they're sick and so we'll make sure we'll cut other places if we need to," Brian said.

Nestle says the single most important risk factor for poor health is poverty.

"If you don't have enough money to eat well, to take care of your health, live a comfortable and relatively stress-free life, your health is going to be at risk," she said.

## **Bad Economy Doesn't Have to Mean Poor Health, AHA Says**

However, Nestle added, there are plenty of low-cost ways to maintain good health. He recommends eating lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, as well as to keep moving.

"All you have to do is move your body. It doesn't matter what you do -- you can walk, dance, do gardening, house cleaning -- all of those count as physical activity and the easiest way to do it is to build it into your daily life," Nestle said. "It doesn't cost you a thing."

"We're urging people to walk every day, to incorporate walking as one of their daily physical activities -- getting off the buses at a stop earlier than your normal stop, walking a couple of extra blocks," Gardner said.

The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week. Walking is "the most accessible form of physical activity and it has the lowest drop out rate among Americans," according to the AHA Web site.

Gardner said the survey was a good wake-up call, and that physical activity, good diet, and stress reduction should not become a victim of the economy.

"I hope it will alert all of us that there is a connection between economic downturn and the perception that people have about their health," he said. "And that we can't let this bad economy make people assume less healthy lifestyles."

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