

## **Long Term Health Trends Continue – Fewer Smokers, More Obesity**

*No significant changes over last two years*

**New York, N.Y. — March 10, 2010** — The annual Harris Poll that has measured key health risks – smoking, seat belt use, weight and obesity – for the last 28 years, provides both good and bad news.

It is bad news that obesity has increased in every five year period since we started measuring it. The good news is that the proportion of adults who are obese has not changed significantly since 2006. It is good news that the proportion of adults who smoke cigarettes declined in every five year period, however it is disappointing that the number is not significantly lower this year than it was in 2005. It is good news that most adults wear seatbelts in the front seat of cars, though it is unfortunate that there has been no significant improvement since 2005.

These are the results of a nationwide Harris Poll survey of 1,010 adults surveyed by telephone between February 16 and 21, 2010. The main findings of this new survey are:

### **Smoking**

- 17% of adults admit to smoking cigarettes in 2010. The average for the last five years (2006-2010) is 20%. In the previous five years 2000-2004, an average of 23% smoked cigarettes.
- In addition to the 17% of adults who smoke cigarettes, an additional 4% smoke cigars or pipes, or chew tobacco.

### **Weight and obesity**

Harris uses two different measurers of obesity. Since 1983, we have used the Metropolitan Life tables for people over 25, based on height, weight and body frame. Since 2005 we have also computed the more widely used Body Mass Index (BMI). The new survey suggests that 34% of adults over 25 (using MetLife tables) or 29% (using BMI) are obese. Using the MetLife measures (we have no long term trend for BMI) the proportion of obese adults increased from 32% for 2001-2005 to 35% for 2006-2010.

### **Seatbelt use**

The new survey finds 87% of adults claim to always wear seatbelts when in the front seat of a car, which is not significantly different from the results of all our surveys since 2005.

However, the average for 2006-2010 at 88% is better than the average of 83% in the previous five years from 2001-2005.

### **A word of caution**

Throughout the 28 years we have conducted this research, the survey has been conducted by telephone. Recent research suggests that there is a tendency, when talking to an interviewer, to underreport socially

undesirable or embarrassing behavior and information. It is *possible*, therefore, that all these surveys underestimate the number of smokers and obese people and overestimate the number of people who always wear seatbelts. Having said that, it is reasonable to conclude that the trends are real.

**So what?**

As mentioned, this new research suggests both good and bad news. But, given the lack of statistically significant changes over the last two years *either of the following are possible*:

- 1) The trends we have documented for every five year period since 1983 – increased obesity and seatbelt use, and decreased smoking – are continuing but at a slower rate;
- OR**
- 2) These trends have ended and the numbers with these health risks has plateaued.

We will only learn which of these is happening in surveys to be conducted over the next few years.

**TABLE 1  
HEALTH RISKS IN 5 YEAR INCREMENTS SINCE 1983**

	Smoke Cigarettes <sup>(1)</sup>	Overweight <sup>(2)</sup>	Obese (20% + Overweight) <sup>(3)</sup>	Always Wear Seatbelts <sup>(4)</sup>
<b>Averages For:</b>	%	%	%	%
1983-1985 (3 years only)	29	59	15	29
1986-1990	27	61	17	60
1991-1995	25	67	19	71
1996-2000	24	75	28	76
2001-2005	23	78	32	83
2006-2010	20	80	35	88

- Notes:
- <sup>(1)</sup> Adults aged 18+ who smoke cigarettes (does not include use of pipe, cigars or chewing tobacco)
  - <sup>(2)</sup> Adults aged 25+ who weigh more than their recommended weight based on height and body frame, using the Metropolitan Life tables.
  - <sup>(3)</sup> Adults aged 25+ who weigh 20 percent or more than their recommended weight based on height and body frame, using the Metropolitan Life tables.
  - <sup>(4)</sup> Claim to always wear seat belts in front seat of car.

Sample sizes are approximately 5,000 adults for each of the five year periods, approximately 3,000 for the first period of three years between 1983 and 1985.

**TABLE 2  
SMOKING, OVERWEIGHT AND SEAT BELT USE – ANNUAL TRENDS 1983 – 2010**

Base: All adults

	Smoke Cigarettes	Are Overweight*	20% or More Overweight*	Always Wear Seatbelts**
	%	%	%	%
1983	30	58	15	19
1984	28	56	N/A	27
1985	30	62	15	41
1986	27	59	N/A	55
1987	28	59	15	57
1988	26	64	18	60
1989	28	61	17	63
1990	26	64	16	65
1991	25	63	15	69
1992	24	66	N/A	70
1994	26	69	N/A	71
1995	25	71	22	73
1996	24	74	24	75
1997	26	72	27	74
1998	26	76	28	77
1999	24	74	27	77
2000	21	79	32	79
2001	25	76	32	81
2002	23	80	33	81
2003	24	80	33	85
2004	25	76	30	83
2005	19	77	30	86
2006	22	83	39	86
2007	24	79	36	87
2008	17	78	33	87
2009	20	80	32	91
2010	17	78	34	87

\*Adults aged 25 and over (for weight only).

\*\*When in front seat of car

N/A=Not available.

Note 1: In almost all years the survey was conducted in January or February.

Note 2: "Overweight" is based on the Metropolitan Life Tables using self-reported weight, height and body frame (small, medium or large). Like all self-reporting this is subject to error, but the identical questions and methods were used in all these surveys.

Note 3: Poll not conducted in 1993.

**TABLE 3  
BODY MASS INDEX (BMI)**

Base: All adults

	<b>Overweight (25 or more)</b>	<b>Obese (30 or more)</b>
	%	%
2005	59	23
2006	66	27
2007	63	23
2008	58	23
2009	66	26
2010	64	29

Note: The data for 2005-2007 was only for adults aged 25+.  
The data for 2008, 2009 and 2010 is for adults aged 18+, so the difference between 2008 and 2007 are **not** a trend.

**TABLE 4  
USE OF OTHER TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

“Do you smoke a pipe or cigars or use chewing tobacco?”

Base: All adults

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
Pipe	2	1	1	*	1
Cigars	4	3	5	3	4
Chewing tobacco	2	2	3	2	2
Smoke Cigarettes	22	24	17	20	17
<b>Use any type of tobacco product (including cigarettes)</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>

**Methodology**

This Harris Poll<sup>®</sup> was conducted by telephone within the United States between February 16 and 21, 2010 among 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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