

## Americans' Health Has Improved Over Past 50 Years

*We know Americans have many health concerns today, but how do we compare to 50 years ago? The National Center for Health Statistics gives an update.*

Everywhere you look, you hear about chronic diseases like heart disease, obesity, cancer, diabetes, along with other major health challenges. They are real and continue to affect millions of Americans today.

Would you like some good news for a change? We have made some significant strides over the last half-century according to a 2002 report from the National Center for Health Statistics.

In a report entitled *Health, United States, 2002*, we find that Americans' health has improved dramatically over the past 50-years. Life expectancy is at an all-time high. We are living longer: to an average of 76.9 years in 2000, compared to 68.2 years in 1950. More good news: infant mortality is also at an all-time low, falling 75% since 1950.

### Other important improvements since 1950:

- ✓ Significant decreases in deaths—up to 50%—from many diseases including heart disease, cancers (since the 1980s), HIV (since the 1990s), and strokes.
- ✓ Falling heart disease rates: over 50% decline in developing heart disease.
- ✓ Falling death rates from stroke: over 65% decline.
- ✓ Falling death rates from injuries, particularly car accidents.
- ✓ Smoking rates have dropped 17% (from 40% to 23%) since 1965.
- ✓ The gaps between men and women, blacks and whites continue to narrow.

### With good news come some continued challenges:

- ✓ Sharp increases in obesity. Over 60% of adults are overweight today, over 25% are obese.
- ✓ 40% of Americans get no physical exercise.
- ✓ Diabetes cases and death rates from diabetes are climbing.

Better health today is attributed to improved healthcare, medical advances, declines in smoking, cleaner water, fortified foods, safer roads and vehicles, and public health. advances. Many challenges still lie ahead, but for today, let's celebrate our improvements.

*References:*

Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics. Internet site: [www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs). (October 2002).

Department of Health and Human Services. Internet site: [www.hhs.gov/news/press/2002pres/20020912.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2002pres/20020912.html). (October 2002).