NUTRITION AND CHRONIC DISEASE

PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

Zachary Macas, Health Policy Analyst
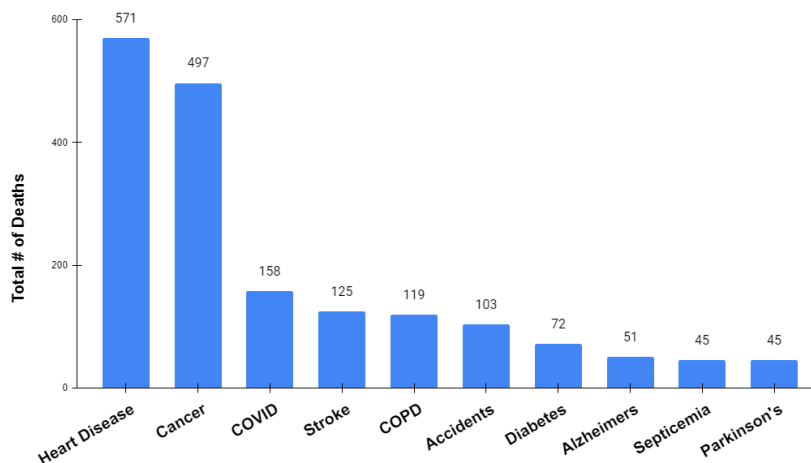

OVERVIEW

Approximately six in ten adults in the United States have a chronic disease, while four in ten adults have two or more. Chronic diseases are defined broadly as conditions that last one year or longer and require ongoing medical attention. These include heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and chronic lung disease, amongst others. Many of these conditions are caused by a short list of risk behaviors:

- Tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure
- Poor nutrition
- Physical inactivity
- Excessive alcohol use

Chronic diseases result in $4.1 trillion in healthcare costs and make up 70% of all deaths worldwide.

HEALTHY DIET

A healthy diet will be different per individual based on specific health goals and/or risk factors. However, consuming a healthy diet throughout life helps prevent malnutrition in all forms as well as many chronic diseases such as those previously mentioned. Eating healthy is a form of primary and tertiary prevention, which are efforts to prevent a disease from occurring, and to help reduce the impact of a current disease.

What does a healthy diet look like for adults? Consuming fruits and vegetables daily, along with protein-rich foods including seafood, lean meats, poultry, beans, lentils, and nuts. Healthy carbohydrates can include rice, potatoes, oats, and quinoa. Try and avoid drinks and foods high in added sugars. Also, although convenient, avoid processed food and fast food as much as possible.

Proper nutrition can have a lasting effect from birth. For most infants, breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition. However, 3 in 4 infants are not exclusively breastfed for about the first 6 months, as recommended. Breastfeeding reduces the risk of chronic diseases later in life for mom and baby.

DATA

Harford County Chronic Disease Prevalence Rates - 2020
Diabetes: 11.2%
Obesity: 30.4%
Heart Disease: 35.5%

6 of the 10 leading causes of death in Harford County in 2020 were chronic diseases:

Causes of Death, Harford County, 2020

SPOTLIGHT

Nutrition and Diabetes

People who are overweight or obese are at an increased risk for type 2 diabetes compared to those who are at a healthy weight because, over time, their bodies are unable to use the insulin they make and effectively secrete it. More than 1 in 3 adults in the United States have prediabetes, while more than 8 in 10 don't even know they have it. Take the test offered by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention here to find out if you could have prediabetes. Diabetes Prevention Programs are offered by the Harford County Health Department at no cost in English and Spanish languages. The purpose of the year-long program is to help prevent type 2 diabetes for those who are at high risk and who have prediabetes. Trained lifestyle coaches will teach participants skills to:

- Lose weight and eat healthier
- Become more physically active
- Manage stress
- Build new healthy habits

Proper nutrition habits such as knowing what foods to eat and which ones to avoid, knowing how to read food labels, planning your meals, and increasing your activity can help reduce your risk.

Sources:
Center for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/about-nutrition/index.html
Harford County Health Department. https://harfordcountyhealth.com/diabetes-prevention/
Maryland Vital Statistics. https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Reports%20and%20Data/Annual%20Reports/2020Annual.pdf
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