Millennials May Not Be As Healthy As They Think

Millennials are known for their interest in yoga, organic food, and other mindful lifestyle choices, but a new report by a major insurance company reveals that the largest generation in the U.S. is actually less healthy than the generation before them.

Folksin that age group are living at 95 percent of their optimal health, according to a Blue Cross Blue Shield Association report that focuses on 10 conditions. That's the good news.

The bad news, however, showed that the prevalence of nearly all of those 10 health conditions had increased in the three years between 2014 and 2017.

Major depression cases jumped by 31 percent, disorders tied to hyperactivity by 29 percent, and Type 2 diabetes by 22 percent.

The results do not surprise [Dr. Olveen Carrasquillo](#), a general medicine practitioner with the University of Miami Health System. "While we have made some progress in areas like cancer and cardiovascular disease, in other areas we are definitely falling behind," he says, pointing to the overall increase in diabetes, obesity, and other preventable conditions.

He cites a telling statistic, released by the government at the end of 2018, which showed life expectancy in the U.S. fell in 2017 for the second time in three years. This was due, in part, to drug overdoses and suicide.

The report also showed that older millennials had a higher prevalence of almost

every condition when compared to members of Generation X at the same age. (Millennials, 73 million strong, are the population born between 1981 and 1996. Gen Xers were born between 1965 and 1980.)

Those numbers are likely a result of changes in society, says Dr. Carrasquillo. "We're seeing societal problems manifest themselves in health outcomes. There's growing income inequality, wages are stagnant, healthcare is harder to access and people are working longer, which gives them less time to care for themselves."

Economic insecurity can cause stress, anxiety, and even depression, he adds. Six of the 10 conditions affecting millennials were linked to behavioral health.

More awareness and more reporting of mental health issues might explain the increase, he says. However, the pressure to keep up appearances on social media and the round-the-clock demand of the digital age carry part of the blame, too. Even with so many possibilities for virtual connections, "social isolation is getting to be a problem, so I wouldn't be surprised if this is one of the causes."

The report analyzed the data of 55 million millennials who were commercially insured. It identified the top 10 conditions that influenced their health, including substance, tobacco and alcohol use, depression and other mental health issues, hyperactivity, hypertension, high cholesterol, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and type 2 diabetes.

Among the findings:

- **Depression rates** increased by 31 percent for millennials but only 16 percent for Gen X and 14 percent for Baby Boomers. (In addition to major depression, hyperactivity and Type 2 diabetes had the largest growth in prevalence for millennials, too.)

- **Overall health begins to decline at 27** for mIllennials.
- **Millennial women are 20 percent less healthy than the men**. This is largely a result of women reporting more cases of Type 2 diabetes and other endocrine conditions as well as major depression.
- **Millennials in southern states were less healthy**, while those in western states are the healthiest. The worst states are Alabama, West Virginia and Louisiana, the best California, Arizona, Nevada and Colorado. Florida falls somewhere in the middle.
- **Almost one-third of millennials didn't have a primary care physician**, compared to about 9 percent of GenXers who don't. This is a troubling trend, Dr. Carrasquillo says, because PCPs are essential in the delivery of preventative care and to early detection and management of disease.

While millennials may still consult a doctor for a specific condition — or use urgent care and emergency rooms — these are no substitute for the watchful eye and continuity of care provided by a dedicated physician.

"Everyone should have a primary care doctor and see him regularly, ideally once a year for a physical. That's the best way to monitor your health, to get the necessary screenings and get the labs you need."

Dr. Carrasquillo would like to see a study analyzing millennial health over a longer period of time. Nevertheless, he considers this report a bugle call to society, the healthcare community and government officials.

"We need to rethink as a society what values are important," he says. "We have to prioritize health. We have to get out and vote for the policy makers who will address the challenges we're facing."

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