American Cancer Society Launches Campaign to Educate Americans about Reducing Cancer Risk

Healthy Behaviors Can Prevent at least 50 Percent of Cancer Deaths

Atlanta 2007/01/24 -Following on the news of the drop in cancer deaths for the second consecutive year, the American Cancer Society is launching the Great American Health Challenge to educate and motivate Americans to take action to reduce their cancer risk. Many Americans are concerned about potentially developing cancer, but in fact, at least 50 percent of cancer deaths could be prevented through healthy lifestyle factors, including not smoking or using other tobacco products, maintaining a healthy body weight, getting sufficient physical activity, eating a healthy diet, limiting consumption of alcohol, and getting cancer screening tests. Research indicates that cutting cancer death rates by 50 percent nationally would save about 280,000 lives every year in the United States.

“A recent American Cancer Society survey found that 59 percent of adult Americans are concerned personally about getting cancer,” said Richard C. Wender, MD, president, American Cancer Society Board of Directors. “We’re launching the Great American Health Challenge to provide tools and support to make it easier for people to take steps that could reduce their cancer risk.”

The Great American Health Challenge, a year-long program, encourages Americans to make a commitment to take the following actions to reduce their cancer risk, or detect cancer when it is most treatable:

- Check – Find out which cancer screening tests are appropriate based on age and family history, and discuss these with your doctor. Screening can prevent cancer or detect it at its earliest, most treatable stage. In January, take the Great American Health Check.
- Move – Be physically active most days of the week; strive for at least 30 minutes of exercise – over and above your usual activities – on five or more days.
- Nourish – Aim for a healthy body weight and eat a well-balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and limit consumption of red meats, especially high fat and processed meats. In August, participate in the Great American Eat Right Challenge.
- Quit – Stop smoking, or join the fight against tobacco as an advocate for smoke-free communities. In November, participate in the Great American Smokeout®.

“The Great American Health Challenge can make a tremendous difference for all of us,” said celebrity fitness trainer Jillian Michaels. “Having lost three family members to cancer, I joined this campaign to help encourage and inspire others to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors. To get started, log on to www.cancer.org/greatamericans and take the Great American Health Check. It will help you learn which cancer screenings are right for you, and will provide information on diet and exercise. You’ll find you’re looking good, feeling great, and reducing your cancer risk at the same time.”

Consumer surveys indicate that the timing is right to encourage Americans to participate in the Great American Health Challenge. When questioned about four of the behaviors promoted as part of the Great American Health Challenge, (not smoking, getting regular cancer screenings, and meeting Society guidelines for fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity), 22 percent of respondents meet three of the four recommendations, fifty-nine percent meet two out of the four recommendations, and only four percent meet all four recommendations.

“We are encouraged that many Americans already are engaging in some of the key healthy behaviors that we know can make a difference,” said Dr. Wender. “There is still progress to be made in cancer prevention and early detection, and the Great American Health Challenge is one way the Society is working to help educate people about what they can do to reduce their risk of cancer.”

The Great American Health Check, which is the first step in the Great American Health Challenge, assesses an individual's risk factors for cancer based on age, gender, height, weight, family history of cancer, dietary habits, physical activity levels, and alcohol and tobacco use and provides a customized action plan. Easy-to-use and confidential, this interactive online tool (www.cancer.org/greatamericans) allows users to enter information for themselves or a loved one, and results in an individualized action plan that provides guidance on which cancer screening tests are appropriate based on age and family history and should be discussed with a doctor. It also offers day-to-day lifestyle suggestions on how to eat healthy, get the right amount of exercise, limit alcohol use and quit smoking.

Screening can detect cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, cervix, prostate, oral cavity, and skin at early stages, when treatment is more likely to be successful. In addition, tests for cervical and colorectal cancer may detect changes in cells before they become cancerous. The five-year survival rate for cancers that can be prevented or detected earlier by screening is about 86 percent, a percentage which reflects real reductions in cancer deaths as well as earlier diagnosis because of screening.

The Great American Health Check will be followed later this year by other Great American Health Challenge components that address nutrition, physical activity and tobacco use. In August 2007, the Great American Eat Right Challenge will provide practical advice and personalized tips on adopting healthy eating habits and getting regular physical activity to maintain a healthy body weight. The 31st anniversary of the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout® will take place in November 2007, and will continue its history of inspiring and helping smokers to quit.

The Society estimates that in 2007 about 168,000 cancer deaths will be caused by tobacco, and scientific evidence suggests that about one-third of the cancer deaths that occur in the U.S. each year are due to nutrition and physical activity factors, including excess weight. For the majority of Americans who do not use tobacco, dietary choices and physical activity are the most important modifiable factors in cancer risk.

For more information on the Great American Health Challenge, call the American Cancer Society, anytime day or night, at 1-800-ACS-2345 or log on to www.cancer.org/greatamericans.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

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This survey was conducted for the American Cancer Society using Porter Novelli's Styles survey respondents who are members of Synovate's Consumer Opinion Panel. The original Styles mail survey was conducted in June 2006 with 13,260 respondents. For this study, telephone interviews were conducted from November 28 – December 11, 2006 among a random sample of 1,244 Styles respondents. Margin of error: The sampling error for the main sample of the telephone survey (n=1,071) is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points.

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