



# Feature Column

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## Towards A Healthier Arkansas

A Message from the Arkansas Department of Health

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### Stay Well—Save Money!

(Little Rock –) I suppose that almost everyone has been thinking about how to make the most of the income they have to live on these days, and most of us are trying hard to find ways to spend less than we have in the past. If you take a hard look at where your money goes, you may find that you can save quite a bit of money by focusing on your health, and doing some positive things about it in the coming year.

Probably the most important single thing that anyone can do, regardless of their overall condition, is to increase their level of physical activity. Current research tells us that getting more physical activity means lower health care costs for individuals and families. Some activity is better than none, and the benefits of physical activity far outweigh any possible risks. However, any time you are planning to change your activity level dramatically, like when you begin an intensive exercise program, you should work with your doctor to make sure you can add those new activities safely, particularly if you have been inactive for a while. Your doctor can help you decide which activities would be best for you.

Increasing your physical activity and watching what you eat are keys to maintaining a healthy weight for your height. Obesity is the single most expensive health factor across the general population, and it is a major contributor to many serious health problems like arthritis, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. It is very likely that you can cut your grocery bill by eliminating soft drinks and snack foods and replacing them with water and fresh fruits and veggies. Most of us eat far more than we need on a daily basis, too, so eating less might be something you could consider. You can learn a lot about what you are eating by making a habit of reading labels. Learning about what is right for your body size and shape can make a big difference in your health. That could help you lower your grocery bills and lose weight, too.

Staying well is much less expensive (and lots more fun) than being sick. Staying well involves

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regular medical check-ups, and making sure you get your routine vaccinations. Your doctor can make sure you get preventive health screenings, followed by treatment, if necessary. If conditions like high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes are diagnosed in an early stage, the harm caused these conditions can be reduced. Also, if certain forms of cancer are detected at an early stage (breast cancer, cervical cancer or colon cancer) the cost of treatment is not only less but the chance of survival from the disease is greatly increased.

Staying well also means that you don't miss work or school, which should have a positive effect on your income.

Some people are surprised to learn how important good oral health is. It affects the way we eat, and complicates many chronic illnesses. The number one reason for school absence in Arkansas is tooth-pain! We could reduce the numbers of cavities in children and adults if every city and town provided fluoridated drinking water.

If you smoke or use tobacco in any form, you should quit! Most likely, you have already tried before and haven't been completely successful. However, if you are looking for a good way to save money – think of what you will save by just not buying the tobacco for your daily tobacco fix! So, not only will you save money by not having to buy these products EVERY DAY, but you will very quickly achieve better health. Your risk of having a heart attack will decrease by 50% in one year. So, decide to quit either smoking cigarettes or using smokeless. You can take advantage of the free program offered by the Arkansas Department of Health by calling the Arkansas Tobacco Quitline, 1-800-QUIT NOW, to get the help you need to get off of tobacco for good. You will be able to talk to a trained Quit Coach one-on-one who will help improve your chances of long-term success in staying off of tobacco. Your Quit Coach will also offer you free patches or lozenges (while supplies last). Studies have shown that working through a quitline with coaching and medication can double your chances of successfully quitting tobacco.

Another way to reduce costs is to stay out of the hospital. The causes for injury vary but many people get hurt at work or at home because of a low awareness of some basic safety precautions. The number one cause of death for all people aged one to forty-four in Arkansas is injury. We could dramatically reduce the numbers of deaths and hospitalizations in our state if people would buckle up, hang up the cell phone, and never drink and drive.

So “tightening your belt” financially may lead you to consider some things that will be really good for you. You might even get to tighten your belt around a new, slimmer waistline, and feel better, too!

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