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Mormon lifestyle is healthiest

By Tim Friend
USA TODAY

The lowest death rates ever reported from heart disease and cancer have been found in a group of 10,000 Mormons, a new study suggests.

Researcher James Enstrom of the University of California, Los Angeles, says key factors for longevity in the study were:

- ▶ Never having smoked.
- ▶ Regular physical activity.
- ▶ Regular sleep habits.

"The study demonstrates that it's possible to achieve extremely low death rates by adhering to a well-defined lifestyle," says Enstrom.

Not smoking was the most important factor. Also important: weekly churchgoing — probably a marker for good social and family support, linked previously to long life.

Other religious groups that embrace the three health factors appear to have similar death rates as the Mormons, even though they consume moderate amounts of alcohol and caffeine, Enstrom says.

Mormons generally avoid alcohol, caffeine and drugs.

Other findings, in today's *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, show middle-aged Mormon men who adhered to all three factors had only:

- ▶ 34 percent the cancer death rate as non-Mormon middle-aged white men. Mormon women had 55 percent the rate as non-Mormon white women.

- ▶ 14 percent the heart disease death rate; Mormon women had 34 percent the rate.

- ▶ 22 percent the overall death rate; Mormon women had 47 percent the rate.

Average life expectancy for a 25-year-old Mormon man is 85; other men, 74. For Mormon women, 86; other women, 80.

Mormon Rules Aid Long Life, Study Discloses

By SONIA L. NAZARO

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Good health practices observed by Mormons result in the lowest mortality rates reported from cancer and cardiovascular disease, according to a University of California, Los Angeles, School of Public Health study.

The eight-year study tracked 100,000 so-called high priest Mormons living in California who observe lifestyle habits recommended by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. These include abstaining from tobacco, alcohol, caffeine and drugs and eating a well-balanced diet.

High priests are long-term devout Mormons who have the highest rank in the church lay priesthood.

Mormon men in the study had one-half the expected number of cancer deaths compared with the general white population; Mormon women had two-thirds the expected number of cancer deaths. Even larger death-rate reductions were evident in subgroups that practice such health habits as never having smoked, regular physical activity and getting seven to eight hours of sleep daily.

"This demonstrates that a major reduction in cancer is possible through healthy lifestyle practices," said James Enstrom, the study's principal investigator. Other studies show that severe obesity, certain occupational exposures, and ionizing radiation increase cancer risk. Exposure to high levels of pollution are thought to do the same, said Lawrence Garfinkel, vice president of epidemiology and statistics at the American Cancer Society, which primarily funded the Mormon cancer study.

Still, Mr. Enstrom said that the gap in cancer rates between groups living in healthy or unhealthy environmental conditions isn't as great as the gap in rates between those with good or bad personal habits, such as smoking, which is the main such factor contributing to cancer.

Middle-aged Mormon high priests who observed all the healthy practices had only 34% the rate of cancer mortality and 14% the rate of cardiovascular disease mortality of middle-aged U.S. white men. A 25-year-old high priest with these healthy habits has a life expectancy of 85 years, whereas the average U.S. white male of the same age will live to 74.

Middle-aged high priest wives observing the healthy habits had 55% the rate of cancer mortality and 34% the rate of cardiovascular disease mortality of middle-aged white women in the U.S. The study said that 25-year-old Mormon wives are expected to live to age 86, six more years than their white female counterparts.

Previous death record studies showed that Mormons have unusually low cancer mortality rates. Indeed, Utah, where 1.2 million of the U.S.'s four million Mormons live, has the nation's lowest rate of cancer deaths—nearly half the national average, said Mr. Garfinkel. Studies of other non-smoking, health-conscious religious groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists show similar low rates of cancer deaths.

Los Angeles Times

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Life Style of Mormons Cuts Risk of Death

Mormons 'Excited' by Health Study ath Rates

By JOHN DART
TIMES RELIGION WRITER

MORMONS: Life Style Trims Their Death Rates

by JANNY SCOTT
TIMES MEDICAL WRITER

A study of nearly 10,000 active Mormons in California credits clean living—no tobacco, regular exercise and a good diet.

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Religiously active Mormons abstain from tobacco, alcohol, coffee and tea.

Mormons 'Excited' by Health Study

By JOHN DART
TIMES RELIGION WRITER

Mormons, whose health codes direct them to abstain from alcohol, coffee, tea and smoking, are "very excited" about a UCLA study showing dramatically lower death rates from cancer and heart disease among their leaders, a church spokesman said Tuesday.

"It corroborates what they have preached for years," said Keith Atkinson, Mormon Church public communications director for California, which has as many as 750,000 members.

The strictures against tobacco, alcoholic beverages and hot, stimulating drinks are contained in the "Word of Wisdom," said to be a divine revelation in 1833 to Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon Church and based in Salt Lake City.

"I think many Mormons are going to feel that a prophecy at the end of the 'Word of Wisdom' is tangibly fulfilled in this study," said Atkinson at his office in the Mormon Temple complex in West Los Angeles. Observers of good health habits are

promised wisdom, stamina and a full life span, he said.

"If phone calls to my office are an indication, church members are very excited about the results," he said.

The study by UCLA's James E. Enstrom, a non-Mormon, was conducted statewide among members of the church's Melchizedek Priesthood. Atkinson characterized the lay priests generally as men 45 and older who have been bishops or presidents or council members at the stake, or diocesan, level.

Not all Mormons are so personally disciplined, Atkinson acknowledged. The "Word of Wisdom," for instance, advises against eating large amounts of meat, but "not all Mormons live by that one," he said.

Soft drinks containing caffeine are not specifically prohibited in Mormon scripture, but church officials recommend avoiding them and they urge moderation in consuming carbonated drinks without caffeine.

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Life Style of Mormons Cuts Risk of Death

By JANNY SCOTT
TIMES MEDICAL WRITER

A study of nearly 10,000 active Mormons in California credits clean living—no tobacco, regular exercise and a good night's sleep—with some of the largest reductions in risk of death from cancer and cardiovascular disease ever reported.

The study, by an epidemiologist at the UCLA School of Public Health, found that middle-aged high priests adhering to those habits had only 34% the normal cancer death rate for their age group and only 14% the normal death rate from heart and blood vessel disease. Mormon high priests are certain long-term, devout Mormons who have risen to the highest

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MORMONS: Life Style Trims Their Death Rates

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rank of the church's lay priesthood.

Their wives, too, enjoyed comparable health advantages. Their rate of death from cancer was little more than half that of white women in general, and their rate of death from cardiovascular disease was one-third of the normal rate.

"If people want to minimize their mortality rate and maximize their longevity, this is certainly one way of doing it," James E. Enstrom, the researcher, said in an interview. "I'm not a Mormon, and I don't recommend that people have to become Mormons to do this." His findings were published today in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Religiously active Mormons abstain from tobacco, alcohol and caffeine under guidelines written down in their Doctrine and Covenants. Mormon doctrine also emphasizes family life, education, a well-balanced diet and good health practices in general.

The priests studied by Enstrom may also have benefited from their participation in so-called social networks, such as their marriages and the church. Past research has linked social networks to longevity, quite apart from other health practices.

"I think there's a social support factor at work there," George K. Jarvis, a University of Alberta, Canada, sociologist, said in a telephone interview. "... There is ample research that if we participate in groups that are meaningful to us, we benefit in health."

To see whether his rather dramatic findings could be reproduced in the general population, Enstrom also analyzed a comparable group of white, nonsmoking, church-going men and women in Alameda County from all religions. He found similar health gains.

"These results demonstrate substantial progress in prevention of cancer and other diseases in one well-defined population, and they suggest a life style that could result in a major reduction in cancer mortality, as well as mortality in

general," Enstrom wrote.

Jarvis, who has published a detailed review of much of the controversial past research on the effects of religion on rates of illness and death, described Enstrom's findings as remarkable for the magnitude of the health benefit he documented.

Enstrom, a researcher in the UCLA School of Public Health who began studying Mormons in the early 1970s, based his findings on responses to detailed questionnaires about life style, diet and medical history mailed out in late 1979 to Mormon high priests and their wives.

Enstrom received responses from 5,231 priests and 4,613 wives between the ages of 25 and 99. He then matched those responses to records kept by the church of all Mormon high priests in California who died between 1980 and 1987.

The findings were most dramatic among priests and wives under 65.

In that group, those who did not smoke, exercised regularly and got seven to eight hours of sleep each night had approximately 34% the expected rate of death from cancer. Their rate of death from cardiovascular disease was about 14% of what is expected, and their overall death rate about 22%.

As an example, Enstrom cited a hypothetical, 25-year-old high priest with those health habits. He would have a life expectancy of 85 and only a 5% chance of dying before 65. The average 25-year-old white man in the United States has a life expectancy of 74.

Similarly, a 25-year-old wife of a high priest who also adhered to those habits would have a life expectancy of 86 and only a 7% chance of dying by 65. The average 25-year-old white woman has a life expectancy of 80.

The women with good health habits had only about 55% the rate of cancer mortality and 34% the rate of cardiovascular disease mortality expected among middle-aged white females, Enstrom found. Their overall mortality rate was about 47% that of the expected rate.

Mormons Among Nation's Healthiest, Researchers Say

By MATEA GOLD
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Vicki and Clair Eckersell aren't hard-core triathletes or fanatical nutritionists. The West Los Angeles couple and their two children merely exercise moderately and eat balanced meals. But they said they weren't surprised to discover they're among the healthiest groups of Americans.

The Eckersells are devout Mormons who adhere to religious mandates prohibiting drinking alcohol and smoking. Those factors, according to a UCLA study scheduled to be published this summer, make Mormons some of the healthiest and longest-living people. Practicing Mormons were found to have one of the lowest death rates from cancer and cardiovascular diseases—about half that of the general population.

The study, conducted by UCLA epidemiologist James E. Enstrom, tracked the mortality rates and health practices of nearly 10,000 California high priests and their wives for 14 years. As a follow-up to research Enstrom published in 1989, the study confirms that the healthiest active Mormons have a life expectancy that is eight to 11 years longer than that of the general white population in the U.S.

Mormon doctrine advises against the use of tobacco, alcohol, coffee, tea and drugs. In addition, devout Mormons practice premarital chastity and post-marital monogamy, which limits their risk of sexually transmitted diseases.

The study, Enstrom said, provides further evidence of how to lead a healthy lifestyle that will cut health risks.

Other religious groups who follow these practices rank with Mormons as some of the healthiest Americans, Enstrom said. "But Mormons form a really good model because there's a large number who are really adhering to this [doctrine]," he said.

The Eckersells said their family's

adherence to Mormon doctrine is typical of others they know.

"This is our religion—it's our way of life," said Vicki Eckersell, 29. "Not only do we reap the benefits at end by living longer, but we live a healthier life throughout our lives. We don't have any addictions or health problems related to addictions."

According to the study, Mormon high priests have only 16% of the expected deaths from smoking-related cancers and 6% of the expected deaths from emphysema, asthma, ulcers, cirrhosis of the liver, homicide and suicide.

The death rate refers to the number of people expected to die in the general population during a given year. The study's author said these rates for Mormon deaths are significantly lower than rates for the general population.

High priests who follow the additional health practices of regular physical activity and proper sleep have an overall death rate that is only 38% of all U.S. white males.

Mormon leaders said active members of the church have known for years that their lifestyle promotes good health.

"I think the Mormon church gets its members to live the religion as a real part of their lives, and not just a Sunday observance kind of thing," said Michael J. Fairclough, a high priest and president of the Los Angeles region.

The study also noted that Mormons who emphasize a strong family life have a network of support that contributes to good health.

"Mormons have a sense of a larger community, of belonging to a larger church unit that is like an expanded family," Fairclough said. "Now there's more scientific evidence that people who live in stable families tend to be happier and have less stress. I think all those things contribute to emotional and mental health, which in turn probably helps physically."