



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 3, 2011

Survey Finds Religious Americans Healthier, Happier

In the latest of its multi-part analysis of more than 550,000 interviews of Americans across the nation, [Gallup](#) found that those individuals identified as “very religious” lead healthier lives than those identified as either “moderately religious” or “non-religious.”

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According to Gallup, very religious Americans, who constitute nearly 44 percent of the adult population, are those who say that faith is an important part of their daily life, and who attend church, synagogue, or mosque nearly every week. By contrast, moderately religious individuals (about 26 percent of the population) indicated that faith was somewhat important in their lives, while non-religious Americans (nearly 30 percent) said that faith and church attendance had little or no bearing on their daily lives.



“Very religious Americans make healthier choices than their moderately religious and nonreligious counterparts,” Gallup found, particularly in the areas of smoking, healthy eating, and regular exercise. “Smoking is one area of particular differentiation between very religious and less religious Americans,” the researchers noted, “with the nonreligious 85% more likely to be smokers than those who are very religious.”

Gallup said that very religious Americans out-performed those in the other two groups in both healthy eating and regular exercise, and speculated that several factors could contribute to the difference, including religious doctrines as well as rules of behavior specific to religious groups.

“Seventh-Day Adventists, for example, strictly adhere to vegetarian lifestyles free of alcohol and smoking, while orthodox Mormons and Muslims do not drink alcohol,” noted the report. “In some Christian denominations, gluttony and sloth are considered two of the seven deadly sins, and many evangelical faiths frown on drinking and smoking.” Additionally, because Christian Scripture indicates that a Christian's body is God's “temple,” the bond between faith and healthy living can be a strong one, the researchers wrote.

In a previous report on its ongoing survey, Gallup found that very religious Americans report [less depression and worry](#) than those with little or no religious faith. According to the survey, while nearly one in six “very religious” American adults have been diagnosed with depression, this group is still 24 percent less likely to suffer from clinical depression than those who are only moderately religious, and 17 percent less likely to be diagnosed with depression than their “non-religious” counterparts.

The study also found that the most religiously faithful Americans are “less likely to report experiencing



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the daily negative emotions of worry, stress, sadness, and anger than are their moderately religious and nonreligious counterparts.”

As to why those with nominal religious faith reported higher levels of depression than non-religious individuals, the researchers suggested an “all or nothing” dynamic, in which an ambivalent attitude toward faith is actually more emotionally detrimental than no faith at all.

Back in October, Gallup issued the first report in its ongoing survey, noting that very religious Americans enjoy a higher level of well-being than their less religious counterparts, based on questions surveying healthy behaviors, life evaluation, work environment perceptions, and emotional health.

Gallup’s editor-in-chief, Frank Newport, told CNN that the survey didn’t try to determine whether the level of one’s religious practice was the determining factor in higher levels of well-being, or if the opposite held true. “All religions have different mechanisms that would plausibly lead to higher well-being,” he said, “including social networks and ways of dealing with stress, but we can’t prove that. It is possible that people with higher levels of well-being choose to be religious.”

But Newport added that whatever the reason, individuals who are deeply religious are healthier and more well-adjusted than those with either little or no faith. “We now have the solution to the health care crisis,” he said, tongue-in-cheek. “If we’re interested in lowering health care costs in America, we need to increase the prevalence of religion.”



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