



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on August 21, 2009

U.S. Life Expectancy Hits New High

In 2007, U.S. life expectancy reached an all-time high of 77.9 years, up from 77.7 in 2006. The National Center for Health Statistics compiled the data based on almost 90 percent of the death certificates filed in the United States.

"Life expectancy in the United States has been on the rise for a decade, increasing 1.4 years — from 76.5 years in 1997 to 77.9 in 2007, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," an August 19 [New York Times](#) article reported. Not only are people gaining more years, they are enjoying more of those years in better health.



"The most noteworthy aspect about all this is not just that people are living longer but living better," said Dr. Gary Kennedy, director of geriatric psychiatry at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, New York. "At the same time, people are living a longer active lifespan. Seniors are healthier, more active and economically better off than they ever have been." Both men and women are living longer, but women still outlive men by roughly five years. As of 2007, women had an average life expectancy of 80.4 years, while men only reached 75.3 years. On the bright side, men are catching up. Back in 1979, women were outliving men by almost eight years.

Dr. Kennedy does caution that the data come from before the economic downturn, and the tough times since 2007 could have a negative impact on health and life expectancy. "I wouldn't be surprised if we see differences in the future because of the economic stress people are under," Kennedy said. "It's good news now, but there could be some painful realities ahead."

Not only that, but the World Health Organization still puts U.S. life expectancy behind many other countries. By WHO's count, 14 other countries enjoy longer life spans of at least 81 years, among them Japan at 83; Australia and Italy at 82; and France, Israel, Singapore, and Spain at 81. These may not be related to better healthcare but to other factors such as the United States' higher violent-crime rate, greater numbers of those who drink to excess (including as drunk drivers), more persons who smoke, more people traveling greater distances on a regular basis, and subtle factors such as a high divorce rate.

Overall, the U.S. death rate continues to drop. In 2007, for every 100,000 in population, there were 760.3 deaths, down from 776.5 in 2006. Also, there were 2,269 fewer deaths in the United States in 2007 than in 2006. Of all U.S. deaths in 2007, 48.5 percent were from heart disease and cancer, but fewer people overall died from heart disease-related problems such as stroke, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

As for the leading causes of death, eight of them saw drops in mortality rates. In 2007, 8.4 percent fewer people died of influenza and pneumonia, 6.5 percent fewer from homicide, 5 percent fewer from accidents, 4.7 percent fewer from heart disease, 4.6 percent fewer from stroke, 3.9 percent fewer from



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diabetes, 2.7 percent fewer from hypertension, and 1.8 percent fewer from cancer.

For all the talk of America's healthcare problems, these improvements are reminders that things aren't as bad as they are being portrayed. They have all taken place without government being in charge of healthcare, and Americans should be leery of any healthcare reform proposal that would give government more control.



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