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## **Study: Americans far less healthy than English peers**

Research focusing on middle-aged residents finds U.S. a sick nation

**By Carla K. Johnson and Mike Stobbe**

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CHICAGO -- White, middle-aged Americans -- even those who are rich -- are far less healthy than their peers in England, according to stunning new research that erases misconceptions and has experts scratching their heads.

Americans had higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, strokes, lung disease and cancer -- findings that held true no matter what income or education level.

Those dismal results are despite the fact that U.S. health-care spending is double what England spends on each of its citizens.

"Everybody should be discussing it: Why isn't the richest country in the world the healthiest country in the world?" asks study co-author Dr. Michael Marmot, an epidemiologist at University College London in England.

The study, based on government statistics in both countries, adds context to the already-known fact that the United States spends more on health care than any other industrialized nation, yet trails in rankings of life expectancy.

The United States spends about \$5,200 per person on health care, while England spends about half that in adjusted dollars.

Just why the U.S. fared so miserably wasn't clear. Answers ranging from too little exercise to too little money and too much stress were offered.

Even the U.S. obesity epidemic couldn't solve the mystery. The researchers crunched numbers to create a hypothetical statistical world in which the English had American lifestyle risk factors, including being as fat as Americans. In that model, Americans were still sicker.

Smoking rates are about the same on both sides of the pond. The English have a higher rate of heavy drinking.

Only non-Hispanic whites were included in the study to eliminate the influence of racial disparities. The researchers looked only at people ages 55 through 64, and the average age of the samples was the same.

Americans reported twice the rate of diabetes compared to the English, 12.5 percent versus 6.1 percent. For high blood pressure, it was 42.4 percent for Americans versus 33.8 percent for the English; cancer showed up in 9.5 percent of Americans compared to 5.5 percent of the English.

The upper crust in both countries was healthier than middle-class and low-income people in the same country. But richer Americans' health status resembled the health of the low-income English.

"It's something of a mystery," said Richard Suzman of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, which helped fund the study.

The study, supported by grants from government agencies in both countries, was published in today's Journal of the American Medical Association.