

Story last updated at 1:10 a.m. Tuesday, December 2, 2003

Poll: Oklahomans not as healthy as they think

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) -- A new poll indicates that while most Oklahomans believe they are healthy, their habits do not reflect a healthy lifestyle.

Eighty percent of those surveyed by The Oklahoman/OU Poll said they consider themselves to be a "healthy person overall." In a separate question, 80 percent described themselves as "living a healthy lifestyle."

But almost 30 percent of the those who believe they are healthy have smoked in the past month, and 52 percent have a body mass index that classifies them as either overweight or obese, according to the poll.

Only 26 percent are exercising at least 16 hours each month.

"There's a real discrepancy between our actions and our perceived health," said Pam Troup, volunteer co-chairwoman of Central Oklahoma Turning Point.

"People who are overweight, who get zero exercise or who smoke rank themselves as 'healthy' only because they're not sick yet," Troup said. "Sadly, the statistics show they will be in the future."

The poll was conducted for Central Oklahoma Turning Point, a grassroots organization devoted to improving the health and medical care of people in the Oklahoma City metro area.

Substance abuse and obesity are Oklahomans' top two health concerns, according to survey results. Heart disease, cancer, teen pregnancy and untreated mental illnesses are other primary issues.

Of those polled, 35 percent said they are worried that Oklahoma ranks in the bottom five states in its overall health, and 32 percent are concerned that one in four mothers of newborn babies hasn't completed high school.

Twenty-three percent of respondents said they do not exercise. Forty-nine percent said they exercise between one and 16 hours a month, and 26 percent said they exercise more than 16 hours a month.

When asked if they smoked or chewed tobacco one or more times in the past month, 27 percent said they did, 73 percent said no. Thirty-two percent of men and 22 percent of women said they use tobacco products.

Many Oklahomans who use tobacco products described themselves as healthy.

"The results of this poll show that we have a lot of work yet to do," said Dan Straughan, Central Oklahoma Turning Point executive director.

People who reported not living a healthy lifestyle cited excessive alcohol, stress, chronic disease, smoking, poor eating habits, lack of exercise and laziness.