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Healthy Monday helps Americans get back on track: Monday described as 'The Day All Health Breaks Loose'

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by Catharine Harris

For many Americans, Monday is no cause for celebration. It signals the end of the weekend and a return to the daily grind of work and school.

And for some, the previous weekend represented a time of indulgence in unhealthy behaviors. Yet, the health consequences that can come with such behaviors — such as cancer, heart disease, obesity and diabetes — are undeniable. So when Monday rolls around and reality sets back in, the question many people must ask themselves is: When the weekend ends, does the unhealthy behavior end with it?



The Healthy Monday campaign wants all Americans to answer "yes." Created in 2006 by the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, in association with the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, the

campaign calls for Americans to adopt Monday as the day they get back on track by engaging in healthy behaviors. With a theme of "Monday: The Day All Health Breaks Loose," the campaign includes a variety of Monday-themed activities for the general public ranging from quitting smoking to eating healthily.

But why Monday? According to the campaign, "Monday is the January of the week, the day to set goals, refocus and recommit. It's a logical day to commit to improving health and wellness — the day to trigger and sustain healthy behavior."

In fact, research conducted by Healthy Monday has shown that people already use Monday that way, Peggy Neu, current president of the Monday campaign, told *The Nation's Health*.

"People know what they need to be doing, but the problem is just getting them to follow through," she said. "Research shows that if you start on Monday, you're more likely to sustain the healthy behaviors."

Healthy Monday's many programs target a wide range of personal behaviors that occur in a variety of environments, including on campus, at work and in the community. For example, Go Red Monday encourages women across America to wear red on Monday and make a point to help raise awareness about the avoidable risks of heart disease, the No. 1 killer of women in the



United States. Quit and Stay Quit Monday provides resources such as tobacco counseling and a hotline that not only helps Americans to quit smoking, but also teaches them how to avoid falling back into the habit. Monday 2,000 promotes health by supporting the Food and Drug Administration's recommendation of eating 2,000 calories per day — especially after a weekend of particularly indulgent eating — by providing nutrition information, recipes and other resources that can help Americans to stay within the recommended calorie allotment.

Question of the Month

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According to Neu, however, the most popular program thus far is Meatless Monday. Spearheaded by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Meatless Monday is not a vegetarian campaign, but rather a national public health campaign that aims to prevent heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer by encouraging Americans to reduce their saturated fat intake by 15 percent. With one day representing 15 percent of the week, setting aside Mondays for cutting out meat and replacing it with more fruits, vegetables and whole grains — foods that help prevent heart disease — Meatless Monday can help Americans reach the goal, according to the campaign.

Making Mondays meatless also promotes sustainable environmental practices, Neu added. In fact, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the livestock industry generates more greenhouse gas emissions than transportation, accounting for 65 percent of human-related nitrous oxide, 37 percent of all human-induced methane and 64 percent of ammonia. By cutting out meat one day a week, Meatless Monday participants not only benefit their own health, but they help to improve the health of the planet, Neu emphasized.

Healthy Monday activities have especially caught on in the social media arena, Neu said, with an average of 20 to 30 bloggers and Web sites, not counting Healthy Monday's own numerous sponsors and partners, featuring Healthy Monday programs each week.

"We're trying to create a movement," she said. "We provide the concept and organizations run with it on their own. We have so many people who comment in blogs — consumers who are now acting as media. It's catching on and spreading virally as people are seeing that it really makes sense, that they can take these small steps."

For more information, including a complete list of Healthy Monday programs and sponsors, visit www.healthymonday.org.

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