

Poll finds very religious have good health habits

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Americans who are "very religious" are more likely to practice healthy behaviors than those who are less religious, a Gallup survey shows.

The new findings are based on a survey of more than 550,000 people who were asked about their decisions related to smoking, healthy eating and exercise. Overall, very religious Americans scored 66.3 on a "healthy behavior index," compared to 60.6 among the moderately religious and 58.3 among the nonreligious.

The very religious were defined as those who consider religion to be an important part of their daily lives and say they attend worship services every week or almost every week.

Researchers found that the nonreligious were 85 percent more likely to be smokers than the very religious.

Gallup said a variety of factors could contribute to the link between religion and healthy living, including Americans following religious doctrine about shunning smoking, alcohol or gluttony. "It is possible, of course, that the noted relationship between health and religiosity could go in the other direction—that people who are healthier are the most likely to make the decision to be religious," the organization said in a December 23 announcement of its data.

The survey, conducted January 2 to July 28, 2010, was the result of a partnership between Gallup and Healthways, a Tennessee company focused on health. It involved a random sample of 554,066 U.S. adults. —RNS