

## Preventative Health Behavior of Baby Boomers: Who are they?

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### Abstract

Preventive health behavior can help individuals avoid various health threats and prolong their physical well-being. Identifying Boomers that have demonstrated preventive health behavior could be advantageous to educators, counselors, and policy makers because these professionals would be more capable of targeting at-risk individuals and implementing necessary programs that could enhance the financial and physical well-being of individuals. Using the 2006 Rand HRS data files, this study was able to include Early Boomers who were born between 1946 and 1955; these individuals were between the ages of 51 and 60 in 2006. The main objective of this study was to identify the demographic characteristics of Baby Boomers; those who are more likely to demonstrate preventive health behavior. To understand to what extent Baby Boomers are involved in preventive health behavior, the likelihood of visiting doctors and the likelihood of smoking were used as dependent variables in empirical models.

The logit results indicate that gender, net worth, education, job tenure, employer sponsored health insurance, perceived health status, and having chronic illness were significant predictors of both smoking and doctor visiting logistic regression models. The females were less likely to smoke cigarettes than male boomers, while female Boomers were more likely to visit doctors than male Boomers. As the levels of net worth increased, Boomers were less likely to smoke, but they were more likely to visit doctors. Boomers with higher probability of living to age 80 were less likely to smoke cigarettes than those with lower probability of living to age 80. As the levels of education increased, Boomers were less likely to smoke, but more likely to visit doctors. Similarly, Boomers who had employer sponsored health insurance and longer period of job tenure were less likely to smoke, but more likely to visit doctors. Having chronic illness was negatively associated with the likelihood of smoking cigarette, while it was positively associated with the likelihood of visiting doctors. As compared to Hispanic/Asian Boomers, both Black and White Boomers were more likely to smoke cigarettes. Also, divorced Boomers were more likely to smoke cigarettes than their married counterparts.

Health educators should advice Boomers and younger generations alike on the importance of practicing preventive health behavior in order to decrease the probability of having health problems in the future. This could include providing or evaluating workshops that outline rules of proper health and further detail preventive health behaviors, such as those mentioned in this study: abstinence from smoking cigarettes and receiving doctor examinations. Financial counselors should assist individuals, especially those close to retirement, in making realistic saving and investing goals in order to cushion themselves against heavy health care expenses during their retirement years. Furthermore, policy makers need to make reformations to public health programs to accommodate the increased aging population who are more likely to need health care. To prevent increased strain on these programs or increased taxes, they should also be familiar with sub-groups of Boomers who demonstrate non-preventive health behaviors, such as those profiled in this study.

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