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PRUHEALTH VITALITY INDEX REVEALS BRITAIN'S HEALTH PERCEPTION GAP

The PruHealth Vitality Index a major study published today, reveals a clear gap between Britons' perceptions of what it means to be healthy and having a real understanding of the impact of lifestyle, diet and fitness levels on current and future health. The Index – which will be repeated on a biannual basis to track the nation's health trends – provides a comprehensive analysis of general health and wellbeing in Britain.

The report reveals that more than two thirds (69 per cent)* of people in Britain claim they are in a good state of health. However, when lifestyle and fitness choices are scrutinised the reality paints quite a different picture as a significant proportion of those who feel they are in a good state of health do not follow a healthy lifestyle:

- only 58 per cent feel they actually follow a healthy lifestyle
- less than half (47 per cent) describe their fitness levels as 'good'
- just a quarter (24 per cent) eat their recommended five a day of fruit and veg
- two thirds (66 per cent) think they are overweight
- a fifth (21 per cent) of Britons smoke
- only a fifth (20 per cent) of Britons don't feel under any stress
- only 14 per cent go for regular screenings or check ups with their GP

Does the nation know what it means to be healthy?

The widest 'health perception gap' is in the South East region where nearly three quarters (73 per cent) believe they are in a good state of health, but in reality less than half (49 per cent) have a good level of fitness, a core component of health. Wales has the lowest number of people who think they are in good health (62 per cent), however, the Welsh are both the least likely to think they are in good health, and also that their current levels of fitness are good.

Regional differences

	General Health Is Good	Current Lifestyle Is Healthy	Current Level Of Fitness Is Good
<i>All</i>	69%	58%	47%
Scotland	75%	62%	52%
London	73%	61%	50%
South East	73%	58%	49%
South West	69%	61%	47%
West Midlands	68%	60%	46%
North West	67%	54%	46%
Yorkshire	67%	53%	40%
East Midlands	67%	60%	46%
East	66%	58%	44%
North East	66%	52%	48%
Wales	62%	59%	44%

Commenting on the findings, Dr David Grainger, Senior Fellow, Cambridge University, said: “This report makes clear that people listen to and understand the public health message. Lifestyles are improving and disease rates are falling. But there is plenty more to do. More than 60 per cent of respondents felt they were over-weight and 21 per cent still smoke. If half of current smokers managed to stop smoking tomorrow, we estimate that nearly a million years of lost life would be saved from heart disease alone. Regular health checkups are particularly useful, and it is disappointing to see that only 14 per cent of respondents had regular health checks, despite the emphasis of the public health message on prevention rather than cure.

“The Vitality Index is a valuable new indicator of attitudes and behaviours that promote a healthy lifestyle. The Index balances the importance of a number of different areas to provide an interesting snapshot of lifestyles across the UK, and has the potential to predict future trends in public health. This focus on balance, rather than over-emphasis of the importance of one particular element of a healthy lifestyle, conveys exactly the right message at a time when we are in danger of being overwhelmed with guidance on staying fit and healthy.”

How can we facilitate change?

The majority (81 per cent) of Britons say they know what they should be doing in order to follow a healthy lifestyle, but many simply aren't putting this into action, with lack of motivation, cost and lack of time clear barriers to living a healthy lifestyle. More than half (53 per cent) of respondents feel free access to exercise and swimming classes would help tackle national obesity, and almost an equal number (49 per cent) claim cheaper fruit and vegetables would have an effect.

Britons also feel it is key to look ahead and target the younger generations to halt rising obesity levels. Nearly a third (32 per cent) believe increasing exercise in schools is an important factor and more than a quarter (29 per cent) feel school meals should be healthier. Almost a quarter of those questioned (23 per cent) felt nutrition and diet classes should be introduced to combat obesity.

However, when it comes to going for health checkups, which are key to identifying potential health issues, only 14 per cent of the population visit their GP on a regular basis, despite appointments requiring just a small amount of time a year and minimal - if any - cost. Even among the over 65s, where established health screening programmes are operating, only about one in three respondents visit their GP for check-ups while feeling healthy, suggesting more needs to be done to encourage proactive health monitoring.

Exercise

While an encouraging 52 per cent of Brits claim to exercise at least three times a week, of those who do exercise, almost a quarter (24 per cent) say their workout is usually 15 minutes or less.. This fails to meet Government guidelines of participating in at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times a week in order to stay in good physical health.

Smoking and Alcohol

Smoking and drinking alcohol are also undermining the nation's health. More than a fifth of Britons claim to regularly smoke, of which nearly two thirds (62 per cent) smoke more than 10 cigarettes each day. A quarter of adults (24 per cent) drink alcohol several times a week with the average drinker consuming seven alcoholic drinks per week. On the basis that an average pint of beer or standard glass of wine accounts for 2.8 units of alcohol, nearly a quarter of drinkers (22 per cent) far exceed the Government's guidelines for maximum alcohol consumption in an average week, which could lead to serious health problems.

Stress

Over three-quarters (78 per cent) of Britons currently feel under some degree of stress, with one in 10 under a great deal of stress. It appears that stress leads Britons to seek solace in unhealthy food with 58 per cent of adults with high stress levels admitting they treat themselves to unhealthy food compared to only 40 per cent of those with low stress levels.

Shaun Matisonn, CEO of PruHealth said: "It's staggering that so many people in Britain are still failing to meet the minimum guidelines for exercise and diet, continue to smoke and drink heavily and yet believe themselves to be generally healthy. The vast majority of Britons say they know how to live healthier lifestyles, yet aren't listening to the advice around them, and it's this inertia that as a nation we need to target in order to encourage change.

"The report also reveals time and cost as the key barriers to following a healthy lifestyle. For half of Britons (50 per cent) their busy day-to-day lives simply get in the way, and the added expenses associated with health and fitness is something many people feel they cannot afford (60 per cent). This indicates that incentivising people to make small changes to their lifestyles - such as PruHealth's Vitality scheme offering rewards for engaging in healthy behaviour - could be one, effective way of encouraging more adults and families to proactively look after their long-term health."

For full details log onto www.pruhealth.co.uk.

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Notes to Editors:

*The research was carried out on behalf of PruHealth, the insurer that rewards policyholders for engaging in healthy behaviour, by Ipsos MORI. A nationally representative sample of 3,034 GB adults were questioned online in July 2008. Results are weighted to be representative of the GB adult population.

Media enquiries

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About PruHealth

PruHealth was launched in October 2004 as a joint venture between Prudential and Discovery Holdings from South Africa. Since launch, PruHealth has grown quickly. It now covers approximately 190,000 lives and in a sample of its individual customers, one third said they had changed their behaviour for the better because of its Vitality reward scheme which encourages policyholders to look after their health.

About Dr David Grainger, Ph.D. (Cantab.), Senior Partner, TCP Innovations

Dr David Grainger is a Principal Investigator in the Department of Medicine, Cambridge University, and a British Heart Foundation Senior Fellow (full CV attached as Appendix 1).

Dr Grainger has spent more than 20 years researching the causes of coronary heart disease, which remains the biggest single cause of premature death in the UK. His research has

included population genetics and epidemiology, as well as molecular studies in preclinical disease models and cell culture. He has published more than 70 papers, many in leading scientific journals such as *Nature*, *Nature Medicine*, *Science* and the *Lancet*.