

EDITOR'S DESK

# Other nations show a longer, healthier life is possible

In 2020, so many more people died in the United States than would be expected in a typical year that the average life expectancy here declined by more than a year. While it was an unusually large decrease, life expectancy has been declining each year in the United States since about 2014.



Jade McDowell  
NEWS EDITOR

That trend is an unusual one. Over the past century, the average human lifespan has doubled throughout most of the world.

This triumph is a combination of many factors, the most prominent of which is advances in medicine. The infected cut you got on your leg at age 5 that would have killed you in 1921 is now easily treated by a round of antibiotics. The smallpox that would have killed you at age 10 has been completely eradicated from the world by vaccines. The Type 1 diabetes that would have killed you at age 12 is now managed by insulin. And so it goes.

Beyond that, we are protected by increased knowledge. We know how important it is to wash our hands and that we shouldn't leave raw chicken out in a warm room for hours on end. We understand the dangers of smoking.

Technology helps too — life jackets, seat belts, air bags, smoke detectors, baby monitors, bicycle helmets, water recycling facilities, pasteurized milk and so many other inventions



Hermiston Herald, File

A cross marks graves in the Echo cemetery.

have saved countless lives.

As our country's ranking on the scale of life expectancy shows, however, scientific advances aren't always a match for other factors. The United States ranked 46th in the world for life expectancy before the pandemic began, according to data published by the Central Intelligence Agency, at just over 80 years — six fewer years than someone born at the same time in Japan.

One of the biggest factors for that is our country's levels of obesity, unhealthy eating and sedentary lifestyles. About 36% of Americans are obese, contributing to a host of health problems that can lead to earlier death — including heart disease, our country's number one killer.

We also have higher rates of death from other causes than most of the world's other rich countries, however. Our drug overdoses are higher, as are our homicides, car crash fatalities and deaths from pregnancy complications.

It seems likely that in our lifetimes we will see other game-changing scientific breakthroughs comparable to the discovery of penicillin. But we must also look at policy changes that help apply what we already know now, so that our country can catch up to other wealthy nations' continued increases in life expectancy.

Take our unusually high maternal mortality rate, for example. According to a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Pre-

vention in 2019, about 700 women die in childbirth or from pregnancy complications in the United States each year, making ours the highest per capita rate among "developed" nations. The report found that about 60% of pregnancy-related deaths that happened between 2013 and 2017 were preventable.

*USA Today's* in-depth investigative series *Deadly Deliveries* shows there are basic steps that all hospitals should be taking to prevent childbirth deaths, but not all are. Such protocols include measuring blood loss during and after each birth and promptly treating high blood pressure with medication to prevent strokes.

The United Kingdom, by contrast, has a panel of experts thoroughly review each pregnancy-related death and work with the hospital and providers involved to determine what could be done differently in future cases. It cut its maternal deaths down by a third from 2000 to 2015.

As other developed nations have shown, we have the tools to reverse the trend of decreasing life expectancy in the United States. To do that, however, we must carefully track the data involved, study it and apply scientifically sound prevention measures based on what the research shows.

A longer, healthier life is within our grasp. But it will take work to get there.

COLUMN

## Guess who is back in the office?

There wasn't any fanfare, no balloons and no banging of cymbals — much like when I left EO Media Group a little more than a year ago.

I recently returned to work on a part-time basis. While I enjoyed my time at home, I was pretty excited to get back into the newsroom.

However, I learned that returning to a job in the midst of a pandemic is much the same as leaving one. Because of limits on gatherings, when I and a handful of my co-workers lost our jobs last March, there wasn't a big farewell party.

And when I returned to the newsroom four weeks ago, there were no welcoming handshakes or good morning greetings. With fewer employees working for the company and many still working remotely, it was like walking into a ghost town. I let myself into the building (it's a good thing I still had the key from the last time I substituted for the records editor), headed back to my old desk area and spent the entire day by myself.

I've learned a lot in this past year — first and foremost, about the transitory nature of life, especially during a pandemic.

On March 23, 2020, I came to work one morning to find a small card with the company logo, my name and the signature of the owner sitting on my desk. The stay-home order issued by Gov. Kate Brown directed Oregon citizens to basically hunker down unless it was absolutely necessary to be out and about. However, driving by Walmart, one would never suspect anything was different.

The card indicated that as a member of the news media, my job was considered an essential service — was is the key. Two days later, I was notified (along with 47 employees across the company), that because of pandemic-related revenue losses, 18% of the workforce received pink slips.

I have a question: Why are they called pink slips? Yeah, yeah, I know, because the piece of paper is pink, but why? Maybe it's the same rationale behind the premise of using soothing pastel colors for patient seclusion rooms in mental health facilities. Pastel pinks or yellows are said to provide a more calm-

ing effect.

But I digress — the first lesson I learned relates to the pitfalls of nesting. Oh, and I'm a nester — ask my husband or any of my friends who have traveled with me. As soon as we arrive at our destination, I start unpacking and arranging the room to my liking.

And I did the same when I arrived at EO Media Group 14 years prior. As I was packing up my belongings, I quickly recognized that, unlike a weekend stay at a hotel, it was going to take more than a couple of hours to clear out my desk area.

While I like to personalize my space, I'm not "moving in" as I return to the newsroom. Currently, my desk area includes a rock I painted, a photo, a couple of my favorite pens and a well-stocked snack cabinet. Hopefully my nesting behavior doesn't go much beyond that — stay tuned.

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*Tammy Malgesini recently returned to the Hermiston Herald as a community writer. She enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.*



Tammy Malgesini

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Kindness to a stranger is a blessing

On May 12, while at the Hermiston Bottle Drop, I had the misfortune of tripping over a parking curb and falling onto the very rough blacktop, suffering a multitude of lacerations — some requiring several stitches and all bleeding profusely. Let me state here that I am almost 92 years old, so you can see that this put me in a serious situation.

A young lady came to my aid and helped me up and into a sitting position, then administered first aid and stayed with me until I was able to navigate again. To say thank you does not seem near enough for your thoughtfulness. It also reminded me that there are still good people in this world.

Roy Drago  
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Printed on recycled newspaper

VOLUME 114 • NUMBER 19

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Periodical postage paid at Hermiston, OR.  
Postmaster, send address changes to Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main St., Hermiston, OR 97838.

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The Hermiston Herald (USPS 242220, ISSN 8750-4782) is published weekly at Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main St., Hermiston, OR 97838, (541) 567-6457.

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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

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