

The biggest health stories of 2024: The year in review



January 8—EPA enacts partial ban on PFAS chemicals: *“Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized a rule that prevents companies from starting or resuming the manufacture or processing of 329 per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that have not been made or used for many years without a complete EPA review and risk determination. In the past, these chemicals, known as ‘inactive PFAS,’ may have been used without review in many industries, including as binding agents, surfactants, in the production of sealants and gaskets, and may also have been released into the environment.”* I’ve long warned of the harms of these forever chemicals on *Intelligent Medicine*, and in my role as President of the Alliance for Natural Health, which launched its PFAS campaign in 2023.

January 17—As progress is being made in curbing cancer deaths, rates of many cancers are increasing—especially in younger Americans: *“Over the last 30 years, the risk of dying from cancer has steadily declined, sparing some 4 million lives in the United States. This downward trend can partially be explained by big wins in smoking cessation, early cancer detection, and treatment advancements. Cancer incidence, however, is on the rise for many common cancers. In the coming year, we’re expecting to hit a bleak milestone—the first time new cases of cancer in the US are expected*

to cross the 2-million mark. That's almost 5,500 cancer diagnoses a day."

May 6—New study reveals that microplastics are now ubiquitous in human brains: *"The parallels between the present data showing an increasing trend in MNP [micro- and nanoplastics] concentrations in the brain with exponentially rising environmental presence of microplastics and increasing global rates of age-corrected Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."* See my article on MNP pollution.

June 10—Revised cholesterol guidelines may mean millions fewer Americans need statins: Previous guidelines were widely criticized for exaggerating risk; the new benchmarks may mean that as many as four million Americans once thought candidates for cholesterol reduction don't need the drugs.

June 28—The Supreme Court reverses the Chevron doctrine, which allowed agencies extensive deference in rule-making: The decision paves the way for the supplement industry to challenge regulatory overreach by agencies like the FDA and FTC that have targeted natural products. This may auger well for consumer access to innovative supplements and for free speech over truthful health claims that are currently throttled.

July 17—The Alliance for Natural Health appoints Jonathan Emord as General Counsel: *"It is an incredible honor to have Jonathan join our team as General Counsel, rather than in his previous role with us as external counsel,"* said ANH-USA Executive & Scientific Director, Robert Verkerk, Ph.D. He continued: *"Having seized the opportunity to open the door to free speech for natural product claims nearly 30 years ago, and with an unparalleled track record in lawsuits against the FDA and federal overreach since, there is no one better than Jonathan Emord to head our legal strategy and actions. The gathering pace of globalization and centralized protection of big corporate interests, coupled with the recent overturning of the Chevron doctrine, point to this being a critical time for concerted action to protect health freedom and related rights."*

August 23—RFK Jr. suspends his campaign and endorses Trump with a resounding speech: *"Today we spend more on healthcare than any country on Earth, twice what they pay in Europe. And yet we have the worst health outcomes of any nation in the world. We're about 79th in health outcomes, behind Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mongolia and other countries. Nobody has a chronic disease burden like we have . . . Two-thirds of American adults and children suffer from chronic health issues. Fifty years ago that number was less than 1%. So we've gone from 1% to 66%. In America, 74% of Americans are now overweight or obese, including 50% of our children . . . So what's causing this suffering? I'll name two culprits. First and the worst is ultra-processed foods. 70% of American children's diet is ultra-processed, which means industrially manufactured in a factory. These foods consist primarily of processed sugar, ultra-processed grains, and seed oils . . . The second culprit is toxic chemicals in our food, our medicine, and our environment. Pesticides, food additives, pharmaceutical drugs and toxic waste permeate every cell of our bodies."*

September 12—Despite the widespread uptake of new weight-loss drugs, new CDC data show adult obesity prevalence remains high: Based on the latest statistics compiled from 2023, there is no state in which the obesity rate does not exceed 20%—one in five. In 23 states, the prevalence of obesity exceeds 35%—more than one in three. Prior to 2013, *not one state* had obesity rates over 35%. The definition of obesity is based on Body Mass Index, or BMI. A BMI in excess of 30 is considered obese. For example, at my present height, 5'10", I would have to weigh 210 lbs to qualify as obese. Keep in mind that the percentage of obese Americans represents only the extreme of the overweight continuum; it's estimated that at least 70% of adult

Americans are now above *optimal* weight.

October 21—Advisory Committee whiffs on condemning ultra-processed foods in proposed Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2025-2030: As I wrote in a recent newsletter article: *“If you were hoping to see where ultra-processed foods might fit in the next Dietary Guidelines for Americans, hold that thought.”* STATnews reports, *“Scientific experts tasked with advising federal officials drafting the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans said the data were far too limited to draw conclusions.”* This is a reprehensible abdication of responsibility, at best an example of “analysis -paralysis”, at worst a capitulation to Big Food which hopes to delay its reckoning with an increasingly sick American populace.

December 2—New study shows how hard it is to predict our responses to foods: Entitled “Imprecision Nutrition? Intraindividual variability of glucose responses to duplicate presented meals in adults without diabetes”, it found that even when individuals were served the same meals, at different times, their blood sugars varied. So much for the predictive value of the much-vaunted Glycemic Index (GI) that purported to show how likely different foods could send your blood sugar soaring. It’s not only different strokes for different folks (inter-subject variation), but also different strokes for the *same folks* consuming the *same foods* under varying circumstances (intra-subject variation)! Once again demonstrating what a complex and ever-evolving field nutritional science can be!

December 4—United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson murdered by assailant claiming retribution for injustices in insurance denials, heightening controversy over the healthcare industry’s role in apportioning benefits: Activists seize on the media attention to galvanize backlash against private insurers—but there is no single culprit in a systematically broken healthcare system with perverse incentives.

December 10—First-of-its-kind lawsuit targets makers of harmful addictive ultra-processed foods: A landmark legal filing alleges a plaintiff’s diabetes and fatty liver disease were directly attributable to aggressive marketing of ultra-processed foods by companies fully aware of their harmful impact. Its pleading draws analogies to the deliberate suppression of information about the deadly effects of smoking by tobacco companies, who deliberately manufactured addictive delivery systems for toxic ingredients known to undermine health. Only this time it’s Big Food that’s in the crosshairs, setting a precedent for legal action to come.

December 11—New international study U.S. has largest gap between lifespan and healthspan of all 183 countries surveyed: The authors state: *“Gains in life expectancy across global populations are recognized as a societal achievement. Increased lifespan, however, does not necessarily mean a longer healthy life. In considering quality of life, healthy longevity is increasingly underscored. To this end, characterizing healthspan—years lived in good health—would be valuable.”*

The global average disparity between years lived and years lived while healthy was 9.3 years; in the U.S. it was 12.4 years “underpinned by a rise in *noncommunicable diseases*.” That means we’re achieving longevity at the expense of dependency on drugs and life-saving procedures—our “Golden Years” are often mired in disability. Once again, underscoring the need for concerted lifestyle initiatives to counter preventable chronic diseases.