
Medical experts say healthy adults should avoid several tests marketed by Life Line, HealthFair
Life Line, HealthFair criticized for selling questionable heart tests directly to consumers

In churches, community centers and businesses around Chicago, two national companies are setting up portable equipment and inviting people to buy cardiovascular tests that they say can help prevent strokes and heart attacks.

Life Line Screening, based in Ohio, advertises the heart and artery tests as a way to "do something about any health issues before it's too late." Florida-based HealthFair touts one test's ability to prevent a stroke's "devastating, irreversible effects to your quality of living."

But major medical associations recommend that healthy people avoid several of the screenings, saying the potential harms from invasive follow-up procedures and overtreatment outweigh the benefit of spotting abnormalities before symptoms appear.

"People may be more likely to run into problems having the screening test done than if the test had not been done," said Dr. Steven Weinberger, CEO of the American College of Physicians.

Heart patients in high-stress jobs, like new Bulls coach, becoming common

Even for people who are at risk of heart disease and stroke, tests are not always a good idea, according to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, a national panel independent of the government that assesses the value of screening for people who have no symptoms.

According to doctors, the best treatment often remains the same whether or not abnormalities are present: exercise, healthy eating and not smoking.

One test marketed by the companies, an electrocardiogram, or EKG, uses electrodes to identify irregularities in how the heart beats and how blood flows through it that can signify heart disease. Other

tests use an ultrasound to scan the arteries for enlargements that could rupture and plaque buildup that can precede strokes.

The medical associations say that, in general, people should undergo testing through their physicians.

On June 8, a HealthFair van was parked outside a Walgreens in Skokie. Martin Kenig, 55, said he first

Both Life Line and HealthFair quiz consumers in consultations and in online forms about risk factors before recommending tests. For people who have none of the risk factors, the companies don't recommend screening but allow visitors to their websites to order the tests anyway.

In one brochure, Life Line recommends the tests for "anyone over age 50 who wants to be proactive

Manganaro argues that the task force's recommendations, and those from other major medical associations that recommend against the screening, are out of date.

"Things change as more information becomes available," he said. "And we're at the pointy end of the spear here in that we're providing the very information that helps to inform the discussion."

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