According to a recent study the U.S. Death rate fell to a historic low in 2004 and the life expectancy at birth hit a record high, according to the National Center for Vital Statistics here.

Final totals for the year show 2,397,615 deaths and an age-adjusted death rate of 800.8 deaths per 100,000 people.

That was 5,673 fewer deaths than in 2003 and represented the largest single-year decline in raw death counts since 1938, when deaths fell by 69,036 from the previous year.

At the same time, life expectancy at birth hit 77.8 years, continuing an increasing trend in the population as a whole and among both blacks and whites, according to the agency, part of the CDC.

“Generally, mortality patterns in 2004 were consistent with long-term trends,” the agency report said.

The “remarkable reduction in the risk of dying,” the report said, “has been driven mostly by net decreases in heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory diseases, and influenza and pneumonia.

The study also found:

*For nine of the 15 leading causes of death – including heart disease, cancer and stroke (the three leading causes) – age – adjusted death rates decreased significantly from 2003 to 2004.

*On the other hand, significant increases in mortality rates occurred for unintentional injuries, hypertension and Alzheimer's disease.

*The male life expectancy is creeping up on the female, with a difference of only 5.2 years, the smallest difference since 1946.

*Age – adjusted death rates for men and women continued to converge: in 2004, the rate for men was 40.7% greater than the rate for women – down from 40.8% greater in 2003.
Despite “a trend toward convergence, “mortality difference between blacks and whites continued. For blacks, the age – adjusted death rate was 1.3 times greater, the infant mortality rate was 2.4 times greater and maternal mortality rate was 3.7 times than for whites.

Life expectancy for whites was 5.2 years higher than for blacks.

The infant mortality rate was 6.79 per 1,000 births.

The leading causes of death remained the same, although Alzheimer's disease overtook and swapped positions with influenza. Heart disease and cancer continued to be the leading and second leading causes of death, together accounting for over one-half of all deaths.

The agency noted that deaths from Alzheimer's continue a rapid rise, because of improvements in diagnosis, awareness of the condition within the medical community, changes in ICD coding and selection rules, and other unidentified factors.

(Source: http://www.medpagetoday.com)

EPA -DOE Release Fuel Economy Lists for 2008 Models


“Today's consumer expect the biggest bang for their buck. By fueling them with information on this year's fleet of vehicles, we are putting Americans in the driver's seat to save money at the pump and protect our environment,” said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson. “As we see in the wide range of fuel efficient leaders, 'going green' can fit the needs of any lifestyle.”

“Greater fuel efficiency is something we must approach more aggressively, effectively and creatively than we have over the past 30 years,” Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman said. “The president's ambitious Twenty in Ten Plan forces us not only to approach increased vehicle efficiency like never before, but significantly reforming CAFE standards in a way where safety remains a priority.

Data show that hybrid vehicles continue to lead the government's fuel economy ratings and hybrid technology can be effectively used to improve fuel economy. The Toyota Prius tops the list at 48 mpg city and 45 mpg highway. More hybrid models are available than ever – including SUVs as well as cars – giving consumers greater choices when shopping for fuel efficient vehicles.

Fuel economy estimates, which appear on the window stickers of all new cars and light trucks prior to sale, are determined by tests that manufacturers and EPA conduct according to EPA specifications. This year's label values are based on new test methods EPA finalized in December 2006. The new methods are designed to better account for actual driving conditions that can lower fuel economy, such as higher speed driving, use of air conditioning and cold weather operation. Because of the new methods. Fuel economy estimates for all vehicles will generally be lower than those of last year.
To view the 2008 Fuel economy guide and for tips on increasing vehicle efficiency: [http://www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov)

More on line sources with fuel economy information:


- Comprehensive information about EPA's Fuel Economy program [http://www.epa.gov/fueleconomy](http://www.epa.gov/fueleconomy)

- The Green vehicle Guide Web site, [http://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles](http://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles), browsers with a guide to locate the cleanest and most fuel efficient vehicle that meets their needs. EPA has just launched a major redesign of this popular consumer-oriented web site to make it even easier to search for greener vehicles.

The 2008 fuel economy leaders within each class as well as the lowest fuel economy models are available at: [http://www.epa.gov/fueleconomy/overall-high.htm](http://www.epa.gov/fueleconomy/overall-high.htm)

Top 10 New Year Resolutions

New Year's Eve has always been a time for looking back to the past, and more importantly, forward to the coming year. It's a time to reflect on the changes we want (or need) to make and resolve to follow through on those changes. Did your New Year resolutions make the top ten list?

1. **Spend More Time with Family & Friends.** Recent polls conducted by General Nutrition Centers, Quicken and others shows that more than 50% of Americans vow to appreciate loved ones and spend more time with family and friends this year. Make plans to meet up with friends for an evening of camaraderie at a favorite restaurant or take the family out for an afternoon of fun. Work shouldn't always come first! For more information about things to be on Onslow County contact Onslow County Tourism at 910-455-3141 ext. 222.

2. **Fit in Fitness.** The evidence is in for fitness. Regular exercise has been associated with more health benefits than anything else known to man. Studies show that it reduces the risk of some cancers, increases longevity, helps achieve and maintain weight loss, enhances mood, lowers blood pressure, and even improves arthritis. In short, exercise keeps you healthy and makes you look and feel better. You may even want to turn your resolution to start getting in shape into one of benevolence as well by participating in a charity walk, run or ride. For more information contact the charity of your choice to see if they have such an event, if not think about organizing one for them.

3. **Tame the Bulge.** Over 66 percent of adult Americans are considered overweight or obese by recent studies, so it is not surprising to find that weight loss is one of the most popular New Year's resolutions. Setting reasonable goals and staying focused are the two most important factors in sticking with a weight loss program, and the key to success for
those millions of Americans who made a New Year's commitment to shed extra pounds. For more information on safe, reasonable weight loss, contact Onslow County Cooperative Extension at 910-455-5873 and ask how you can Eat Smart, Move More and Weigh Less.

4. **Quit Smoking.** If you have resolved to make this the year that you stamp out your smoking habit, over-the-counter availability of nicotine replacement therapy now provides easier access to proven quit-smoking aids. Even if you've tried to quit before and failed, and don't let it get you down. On average, smokers try about four times before they quit for good. Start enjoying the rest of your smoke-free life! Even Allegheny County is trying to go smoke-free and it's taken than a few tries as well. Locally, there are a variety of free support services, hotlines ad smoking cessation classes to help you kick the smoking habit. Contact Gary L. Miner, Sr. at Onslow County Tobacco Awareness Program at 9(10) 455-1326 or (910) 340-7045 or e-mail him at minergrl@ec.rr.com.

5. **Enjoy Life More.** Given the hectic, stressful lifestyles of millions of Americans, it is no wonder that “enjoying life more” has become a popular resolution in recent years. It's an important step to a happier and healthier you! Consider one of Onslow County's holistic healing centers for products designed to bring balance to your body, mind and soul. Or just get out and try something new! Take up a new hobby or try your hand at skiing. Go to a theater performance, or head to the local spa. Onslow County offers a wealth of artistic and recreational activities to meet just about anyone's wishes. For recreational activities contact Onslow County Park and Recreation at (910) 347-5332 or web at www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks

6. **Quit Drinking or Drugs.** While many people use the New Year as an incentive to finally stop drinking or using drugs, most are not equipped to make such a drastic lifestyle change all at once. Many heavy drinkers and drug users fail to quit cold turkey but do much better when they have help or support. If you have decided that you want to stop drinking or using drugs, there is a world of help and support available. Onslow County Alcoholics Anonymous offers meetings throughout the greater Onslow County area. There are also a number of treatment-based programs, as well as support groups for families of alcoholics and drug users. For more information contact Alcoholics Anonymous at (910) 455-3666 or Onslow Carteret Behavioral Healthcare Services at (910) 353-5118.

7. **Get Out of Debt.** Was money a big source of stress in your life last year? Join the millions of Americans who have resolved to spend this year getting a handle on their finances. It's a promise that will repay itself many times over in the year ahead. For more information on how you can get a handle on your family's finances contact your local Cooperative Extension at (910) 455-5873.
8. **Learn Something New.** Have you vowed to make this year the year to learn something new? Perhaps you are considering a career change, want to learn a new language, or just how to fix your computer? Whether you take a course or read a book, you'll find education to be one of the easiest, most motivating New Year's resolutions to keep. Coastal Carolina Community College offers a wide variety of "lifelong learning" courses and many local agencies offer great recreational training for beginners of all age. For more information contact Coastal Carolina Community College at (910) 455-1221 or the Onslow County Council for the Arts at (910) 455-9840.

9. **Help Others.** A popular, non-selfish New Year's resolution, volunteerism can take many forms. Whether you choose to spend time helping out at your local library, mentoring a child, or building a house, there are many nonprofit volunteer organizations that could really use your help. The Onslow County Cares organization makes it easy by connecting volunteers with projects to fit practically any schedule. Or if your time is really in short supply, maybe you can at least find it in you to donate the furniture, clothing and other household items that you no longer need, rather than leaving them out by the curb to fill up our landfills. For more information on volunteering in Onslow County contact the Volunteer at (910) 938-4357.

10. **Get Organized.** On just about every New Year resolution top ten list, organization can be a very reasonable goal. Whether you want your home organized enough that you can invite someone over on a whim, or your office organized enough that you can find the stapler when you need it, having help in the way tips and resources can get you started on the way to a more organized life. For more information on getting organized continue on to the next article.

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### 10 Steps to an Orderly Kitchen

The kitchen is an area of your home that gets used more often than most other areas. So it stands to reason that if your kitchen were more organized and simple to use, your life would feel easier. Here are 10 easy steps to organize your kitchen, and make your family life flow more smoothly when it comes to meet preparation.

1. **Start by pulling everything out of each cabinet and going through it.** Discard broken items. Donate those things that are not frequently used, duplicate items, or things you forgot you had (if you forgot them, you don’t need them). Do this with each cabinet and drawer, put similar items together in separate areas on the floor. Don’t be sentimental. Most kitchens are short on storage space, so the goal is to only have things you love and use.

2. **After your cabinets are all empty, consider what is best for you in terms of how to group items.** Sort all your baking items and pile them together. Sort your cooking items and pile them together. Group the everyday dishes and glassware in
one area and holiday or other seasonal items that only get used once or twice a year as well as those special entertaining or serving pieces that are only used occasionally in another.

3. Now that you have groups laid out on the floor, decide where each item should be stored. Cooking and baking pieces should be kept close to where you do food preparation. Utensils should be in the drawer nearest to the prep area as well. Glassware might be best near the sink or refrigerator. Make a coffee or tea station that includes appliances, filters and mugs as well as coffee, tea bags, sugar, creamer, and place it near the water source, if possible. This way you avoid going back and forth across the kitchen for the things you need just to make your morning beverage. The goal is to make things more convenient for yourself.

4. Containerize inside your cabinets. Group together things like packets of sauce mixes, gravy mixes, hot cereal packets and put them into small plastic containers to avoid them being scattered all over the cabinet. Use clear plastic shoe boxes to store food that is in small boxes or bottles such as gelatin or pudding mix and spices.

5. Discard containers without lids, and store the remaining plastic containers either with the lids on them, or store the lids in another larger container so they all stay together. Do the same with the lids for your pots and pans. A large clear plastic box will keep them nicely together and on their sides. Another option is to store them on their sides in the cabinet on a wire rack or dish drainer.

6. Make use of vertical space. Place hooks underneath cabinets to hold mugs above the countertop, or hang a stemware rack for wine glasses. This will free up a lot of cabinet and counter space. You could also hang adhesive hooks on the inside of cabinet doors or pantry doors to hold tools such as measuring cups, oven mitts or other kitchen gadgets. Consider using wall space or a ceiling rack to hang pots and pans. Keep in mind that any vertical space you can use to hang something will free up horizontal space inside a cabinet or on a counter.

7. Use lazy susans, or sliding trays and add in cabinet shelving to hold things such as oils, vinegars and other cooking ingredients, as well as spices, vitamins or medications.

8. Use drawer dividers for cooking utensil drawers and in your junk drawers. Everyone needs a drawer to keep those little miscellaneous things, but junk drawers don't have to be junky. Drawer dividers will allow you to assign a little spot for each thing, and you'll be able to find things when you need them.

9. Get a magnetic sorter box to hang on the side of the refrigerator for coupons, takeout menus, a notepad and pen or other papers that tend to accumulate on the countertops. Each type of paper should have its own section in the sorter.

10. Keep trash bags near the trash can, and toss a stack of loose bags into the bottom of the can. That way,
when you pull out one bag, there is already another one right below it waiting to be used. If you put your trash out at the curb once a week, use that time to clean out your refrigerator each week too. See what food needs to be pitched and immediately throw it out, and then take the trash out to the curb right then.

Your personal work style will determine where you store and use the items in your kitchen, but the goal is to get that room and its contents to serve your needs as smoothly and efficiently as possible. If you invest a little time and energy into organizing your kitchen, it is an investment that will pay off in happiness for years to come.

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**Million-Dollar Smile**

Do you have a perfect smile or do you always feel compelled to cover your mouth when you laugh? Do you hate to smile for pictures? Have you ever wished you'd been born with great teeth? Join the crowd. The truth is, few people are born with perfect smiles. Those million dollar mouths you see plastered all over magazines and television are often the result of many trips to the dentist or orthodontist, and can be yours for a few thousand dollars and some time in dental chair.

Is it worth it? Many times, it is. If you're self-conscious about your teeth, it's probably affecting the way you communicate. Whether you rarely smile or always smile behind your hand, you're telling the world one of two things: you're either a sour puss or you have something to hide.

Don't let this happen to you---especially since there are so many affordable alternatives these days. If you want a long-lasting way to improve your image and boost your self-esteem, invest in your smile. The easiest and most obvious way is through regular dental care. You know the drill: brush and floss your teeth at least twice a day, visit your dentist every six months. You've probably been doing it all your life...but do you know exactly why?

Here's the short answer: Your mouth is a breeding ground for bacteria. Dark, warm, and moist, it's a haven for microscopic organisms. Which is precisely why regular care is so important. The most persistent pest is plaque, that sticky, colorless bacteria that forms on the teeth and creates the toxins that can lead to periodontal disease if neglected.

Regular brushing removes the plaque, just as regular flossing will dislodge any food particles left behind by brushing. Routine visits to the dentist, which usually include a cleaning and a checkup, with remove any residual plaque buildup and ensure a clean bill of dental health.

Also, remember to change your toothbrush regularly. Dental experts suggest getting a new toothbrush about every three months. You may also want to change your toothbrush if you're getting over a cold, sore throat, or some other short-term illness. If you choose not to replace at least immerse your toothbrush in boiling water for a few minutes to kill any lingering germs.

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