

## Healthy Adults: Physical Activity & Good Nutrition



### FACING THE ISSUES

- Nearly 59 million adults age 20 or older are obese and at an increased risk for chronic disease.
- The percentage of young people 6–19 years of age who are overweight has more than doubled in the last 20 years.
- Physical inactivity and poor nutrition contribute to obesity, poor heart health, and other chronic diseases and are responsible for at least 400,000 deaths each year.
- Adequate physical activity and a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can help protect adults from many chronic diseases.

*CDC's Prevention Research Centers create environments that support physical activity and good nutrition, which are critical to fighting obesity and other chronic diseases.*

### Building Capacity for Healthy Living

The Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) help local health advocates develop skills to create and implement community programs that encourage healthy living. At one PRC, community health advisors (CHAs) are trained in leadership and problem solving and in identifying community resources that help local residents live healthy lives. CHAs learn to conduct activities to promote good nutrition and physical activity and to lead health fairs, walking clubs, and exercise classes. Some health advocates develop walking trails, while others create weekly farmers' markets where residents can shop for fresh produce not otherwise easily accessible. The researchers assess the lifestyle changes the CHAs make among themselves and the effect their activities have on their communities' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to chronic disease prevention.

nutrition science. Many of these professionals serve people with low incomes or limited or no access to health care services. These practitioners learn to apply behavior-change theory and to conduct health promotion interventions at the community level.

The PRCs also guide state and local public health professionals by recommending best practices and effective programs related to physical activity. Researchers at one PRC are developing methods for disseminating CDC's recommendations on what works in promoting health and preventing disease. Dissemination methods include mailings, conferences, workshops, and programs on compact disc that suggest how the recommendations should be applied. The researchers compare the awareness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of the recommendations among participants. The results help the researchers determine which dissemination methods work best and understand what state and local health departments need to translate physical activity recommendations into policy and practice.



The Prevention Research Centers are a network of academic health centers, partner communities, and public health practitioners that conduct community-based participatory research to prevent disease and disability.

Every year, one PRC offers nutrition training for state and local public health professionals who want to increase their knowledge in

Researchers at several PRCs conduct research to understand and improve how well surveys and other tools measure physical activity, assess behaviors that contribute to obesity, and inform public health practitioners about subgroups at risk for poor health due to low levels of physical activity and other poor health habits. The researchers have developed and tested survey questions assessing factors such as levels of leisure-time and occupational activity as well as weight control practices.

## Promoting Environmental Supports

Several PRCs study the socio-cultural and environmental factors that can discourage or promote physical activity and healthy eating in communities. Factors such as designated walking and bicycling trails, sidewalks, street lamps, quality of public transportation, road safety, pollution, and location of shopping centers and recreational facilities are being examined to determine their association with residents' body weight, participation in and attitudes about physical activity, and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

At one PRC, researchers are exploring how federal, state, and local policies influence the built environment, which can influence residents' access to fresh foods and to parks and other recreational facilities.

## Spotlight on Success

**The Prevention Research Center in South Carolina encouraged residents of Sumter County to form a community coalition and helped the coalition set goals and objectives for increasing residents' physical activity. The coalition developed several walking programs and National Trails Day events. The community's heightened awareness of the need for physical activity, but the lack of resources for it, led to advocacy resulting in increased sidewalk projects, completion of local walking trails, and the printing and distribution of 24,000 maps that identify walking routes. The community coalition also helped develop bicycle lanes and share-the-road and adopt-a-park projects, and helped one of the county's largest employers establish a work-site wellness policy. Now the researchers are helping the coalition evaluate the effect of these environmental and policy changes.**

## Networking for Obesity Prevention and Control

In response to the U.S. obesity epidemic, a set of PRCs formed an Obesity Prevention Network. The researchers work together to identify effective and innovative public health promotion and prevention strategies for obesity control. Contributions include best practices, program guidelines, evaluation strategies, and creative interventions. Technical assistance is provided to state public health professionals and program developers to enhance data collection and reporting systems necessary for planning and implementing programs.

The network and several individual centers are especially concerned with the health of children in their communities. Several PRCs work with schools, families, and community organizations in studying how to increase physical activity, promote diets rich in fruits and vegetables, and enhance support for healthy behaviors. For details about the PRCs' programs and activities aimed at promoting physical activity and good nutrition among young people, see the related fact sheet, *Healthy Youth: Physical Activity and Good Nutrition*.

The PRCs are developing, testing, evaluating, and promoting nutrition and physical activity interventions, policies, and environments that help Americans live long, healthy lives.