

Healthy Adults: Physical Activity & Good Nutrition

FACING THE ISSUES

- *Nearly 30% of U.S. adults age 20 or older are obese and at an increased risk for chronic disease.*
- *Physical inactivity and poor nutrition contribute to obesity as well as heart disease and other chronic diseases.*
- *At least 400,000 deaths each year are related to poor diet and physical activity.*
- *Adequate physical activity and a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can help protect adults from many chronic diseases.*

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

Building Community Capacity for Healthy Living

Several Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) help local health advocates develop skills to create and implement community programs for healthy living. At the PRC in Alabama, community health coordinators (CHCs) are given materials and step-by-step instructions for recruiting and training community health advisors (CHAs) who promote physical activity, healthy eating, and health screenings among their neighbors. The researchers assess the lifestyle changes the CHCs and CHAs make among themselves and the effect their activities have on their communities' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to chronic disease prevention.

In Illinois, PRC researchers are taking an effective clinic-based physical activity intervention—an intensive 12-month program that promotes weight loss and a healthy lifestyle—and adapting it for use in a community setting. CHAs are trained to deliver the program in a variety of

settings, such as churches, schools, work sites, and health-care facilities. Researchers are evaluating participants' weight, physical activity levels, and health-promoting behaviors.

In North Carolina, PRC researchers are training women to facilitate community groups in which women learn strategies to manage stress, prevent and control obesity, and overcome barriers to change. Each participant sets a health behavior goal and a life improvement goal. Researchers are assessing changes in the women's emotional, physical, and economic well-being after participating in the program.

In California, researchers at a PRC are working on strategies for increasing physical activity in Latino families. The strategies include setting up walking programs for adults and disseminating a communications campaign that emphasizes the health benefits of physical activity and the importance of family support. The researchers are training CHAs to recruit and motivate walkers, teach pedestrian safety, lead walking



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.

groups, and track group progress. They are also assessing the participants' physical activity levels, dietary habits, and barriers to being physically active.

PRC researchers in Iowa are looking at ways to help community residents reduce their overall body fat by engaging in physical activity and eating fruits and vegetables. The entire community—restaurant owners, community residents, public health staff, and leaders from churches, libraries, high schools, and parks and recreation services—is involved in the intervention. The restaurant owners offer healthy food options, and store owners support healthy food demonstrations and labeling of foods certified as “heart healthy” by the American Heart Association.

Researchers from five PRCs are working together to improve understanding of how health policies affect physical activity in communities. The members of this network build on PRC research by identifying environmental, social, and individual factors that affect participation in physical activity.

Building Public Health Capacity

Since 1995, the PRC in South Carolina has offered a physical activity and public health training

course for public health practitioners involved in community-based initiatives to promote physical

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 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 new 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 effects of these environmental and policy changes.

activity. The practitioners learn how to plan, implement, measure, and evaluate physical activity promotion programs in communities. The PRC also offers a postgraduate course on research directions and strategies in physical activity and public health. The course focuses on methods for measuring and promoting physical activity, selecting research designs, and conducting studies of physical activity in specific populations.

The PRC in North Carolina offers a nutrition and public health training course for community practitioners that covers how to plan and develop nutrition interventions at the individual, organizational, community, and policy levels. It emphasizes nutrition interventions for low-income and minority women whose dietary and lifestyle practices put them at increased risk for chronic diseases.

Researchers at several PRCs study 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. The researchers develop and test survey questions assessing factors such as levels of leisure-time and occupational activity as well as weight control practices.