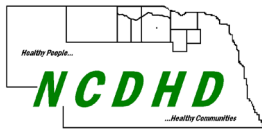


News Release



North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) represents the following counties;
Antelope, Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Pierce, and Rock
316 East Douglas Street, O'Neill, NE 68763
(402) 336 - 2406 or (877) 336 - 2406

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 9, 2003

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Roger Wiese 402-336-2406
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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

National Health Education Week is October 20 – 26, 2003 and as we look around us, fewer Nebraskans are smoking. Deaths due to coronary heart disease are declining. A greater proportion of mothers giving birth in this state are receiving early prenatal care. Seatbelt use is up. But some bad news: obesity is up as well.

The improvements in the health status of Nebraskans that have occurred in the past decade are the result of the efforts of public health. But something public health needs to address, and people on the individual level need to address, is the growing epidemic of obesity in Nebraska and the rest of the country.

Obesity is a serious public health issue because being overweight is a risk factor for diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, degenerative arthritis and certain types of cancer, such as colon, breast, prostate and gallbladder.

The obesity problem can be attributed to a sedentary lifestyle and poor eating habits—little or no exercise and too many chips, burgers, pizza, french fries and soft drinks.

Almost 25 percent of Nebraskans are considered obese, meaning they have an abnormally high proportion of body fat. That percentage has doubled since 1990. In addition, another 37 percent of us are overweight.

Extra pounds are a leading cause of preventable death. About 300,000 people in the U.S. die every year from illnesses caused or worsened by obesity. Obesity may soon overtake tobacco as the chief cause of preventable deaths.

The problem is basic: It's calories in versus calories expended on a daily basis. The solutions to being overweight are basic: Eat less and exercise more. It may sound hard but it really isn't.

Some simple changes in habits could have lifelong benefits. Cutting back on calories by cutting back on foods high in sugar and fat is important, as well as cutting back on quantities. Eat fruits to get a sugar fix, rather than a candy bar. Eat vegetables as in choosing salads at meals. Choose whole grain foods like wheat bread rather than white bread. Turn off the television and the computer. Take a walk occasionally. Take the stairs. Park in the

furthest open space on the lot, not the closest, and walk to the store. It's the little things that count. It's the habits that you incorporate into your day that will determine your poundage.

October is inclusive to the National Health Education Week, from the 20th through the 26th. This is an excellent time to evaluate our health behaviors and implement simple changes that have lifelong health benefits, not only to our own person, but to our families included.

Through partnerships with local health departments, most of which are newly formed, we expect to continue to improve the health of Nebraskans. For more information, contact your local health department.

Sincerely,
Roger Wiese,
Director
North Central District Health Department