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College of Human Ecology

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Selected Human Ecology Initiatives Addressing Obesity Issues

Preventing Childhood Obesity: An Ecological Approach

- A six week on-line course trains nutrition and health professionals on how to take an ecological approach to preventing childhood in their communities. The course is offered for the fourth time in Fall 2007 through Cornell NutritionWorks online professional development program.
- Course evaluations to date (n=44) show that the proportion of respondents who felt confident in their ability to take an ecological approach and develop a community-based action plan to address childhood obesity rose from a mean of 22% at baseline to 87% by the end of the course.

Web site: www.nutritionworks.cornell.edu.

Obesity Prevention In a Rural Community

Key findings from the community environmental intervention, Small Steps are Easier Together include:

- 315 women and 68 men joined one of 12 community walking teams and logged 70+ million steps.
- 20% of women met the intervention goal of adding 2,000 extra walking steps at least 3 times per week for at least 6 weeks.
- Chef volunteers added healthy food options to 22 separate community events that reached 542 residents.
- Participants were more likely at the end of the intervention to say they walked regularly for exercise, participated in a walking group, brought healthy dishes to community events, and encouraged others to do so.

Economics of Obesity

- In a study of the relationship between body weight and labor market outcomes, the researcher found that weight lowers wages for white females, but not for African-American or Hispanic women or for men of any race or ethnicity.
- For white females, an additional 65 pounds is associated with 9 percent lower wages.

Neighborhood Design

- A faculty member is studying the effects of neighborhood design features on physical activity, as well as the relation between the nearby food environment (i.e. the availability and affordability of healthy foods) and residents' diets.

Food Choice and Obesity

- A nutritional sociologist has developed a conceptual model of how people make food choices in the book *Psychology of Food Choice*.
- It will shape the way clinicians, policy makers, and the food industry thinks about food selection.

Integrated Nutrition and Parent Education for Obesity Prevention

- *Collaboration for Health, Activity, and Nutrition in Children's Environments (CHANCE)* is an EFNEP pilot project developing and evaluating innovative ways to prevent childhood obesity by targeting key behaviors among parents and children.
- The intervention integrates parenting skills with nutrition education to change children's environments at home and in the community.

Empire State Poll

- A faculty member is surveying NYS residents on their willingness to support policies addressing childhood obesity. Empire State Poll questions can inform development of anti-obesity initiatives.
- First year survey results suggest that state policies for addressing childhood obesity would receive the most support if they focused on high-calorie foods sold in New York schools

The Healthy Start Partnership

- Obesity in early childhood has its roots in pregnancy and infancy, according to recent research at Cornell and other universities.
- 43 health and nutrition professionals in 8 New York State rural counties are implementing environmental interventions to address the fetal and infant origins of childhood obesity.
- Web site: www.human.cornell.edu/che/DNS/hsp/

Selected Faculty in the College of Human Ecology

Addressing obesity issues brings together psychology, sociology, nutrition, human development, economics, and design of environments for communities and people over their life spans.

John Cawley

Associate Professor, Policy Analysis and Management

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Economics of obesity including the effect of body weight on labor market outcomes: wage rates, unemployment, employment disability, transition from welfare to work.

Carol Devine

Associate Professor, Nutritional Sciences

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Continuity and change in food choices; creating food and physical activity environments in workplaces and communities that promote healthy eating and active living to prevent obesity.

Jamie Dollahite

Associate Professor, Nutritional Sciences

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Nutrition education for limited-resource audiences that is designed to prevent obesity and chronic disease.

Christine Olson

Professor, Nutritional Sciences

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Community-based intervention to promote healthy body weight in mothers and infants; relationship of the rural food and physical activity environment to body weight in women and children.

Jeffery Sobal

Professor, Nutritional Sciences

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Social science nutrition, particularly social patterns of obesity, food choice processes, and food systems analysis.

Christina Stark

Extension Associate, Nutritional Sciences

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Continuing education of nutrition and health professionals through the Cornell NutritionWorks online professional development program.

Nancy Wells

Associate Professor, Design and Environmental Analysis

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Impact of built and natural aspects of the residential environment on human health and well-being – in particular, the effects of neighborhood characteristics on physical activity, diet, and obesity.

Prepared by Dr. Josephine A. Swanson, Associate Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Assistant Dean for Outreach, College of Human Ecology

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