

Family History and Your Health

Family Health History and Physical Activity

With summer in full swing, many families spend more time outdoors enjoying Michigan's wonderful parks, lakes and other recreational activities. Most people find it easier to get more physical activity in the summer than other times of the year. Physical activity is important for good health year round, but what does it have to do with your family's health history?

You can think of your family health history as a "picture" of yourself and your close relatives—including how the genes you inherit, the food you eat, and other habits such as exercise affect your health. Lack of physical activity increases your risk for chronic diseases like Type 2 diabetes, stroke and osteoporosis. It also contributes to overweight and obesity—which often run in families.

About 12% of Michigan children are overweight. An additional 14% are at risk of being overweight. If this trend continues, the next generation of adults will have more health problems than ever before. But parents can help:

- ◆ Be aware of your family health history, and whether your relatives tend to gain weight;
- ◆ Take steps today to increase your own level of physical activity; and
- ◆ Go to www.emc.cmich.edu/healthyweight/ to get great ideas on how to be a healthy family



Did you know?

The 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity (such as walking, light gardening or dancing), beyond home and work activities, to reduce the risk of chronic disease. For children and adolescents the recommendation is 60 minutes a day of physical activity.

Where does Michigan Stand?

According to the 2004 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, almost one quarter of adults 18 and over have no leisure time physical activity. This includes activities such as running, golf, gardening or walking for exercise.

According to the CDC obesity trends, Michigan is one of the worst states in the nation with over 25% of the population being obese.

(www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/maps/)



What Do We Know About Genetics and Obesity?

Obesity involves environmental factors as well as genetics. This is what we know:

- ◆ Biological relatives look like each other in many ways, including body weight. People with a family history of obesity may be predisposed to gain weight, so prevention strategies are important.
- ◆ If you have a parent who is relatively overweight, your risk of being overweight is doubled.
- ◆ If your parent is moderately obese, your risk is tripled.
- ◆ If your parent is severely obese, the risk is five times greater.
- ◆ Although rare genetic disorders account for less than one percent of all obesity cases, studying these disorders provides valuable insight on how genes contribute to obesity.

Family-centered approaches and using family health history may be successful in preventing obesity in children who are at increased risk. For more information on the genetics of obesity, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Health Perspectives at www.cdc.gov/genomics/training/perspectives/obesity.htm.



On the Web...

Michigan Health Tools:

A gateway for better health in Michigan
www.MIhealthtools.org

Exercises that can keep you active
while at your desk
www.cscce.edu/wellness/office.htm

National Nutrition and Physical
Activity Guidelines
www.nutrition.gov





The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see.

-Sir Winston Churchill

What Can You Do?

Physical activity is important for everyone, and more so for those with a family history of being overweight. Talk about your family health history with your children, and help them find some kind of physical activity to enjoy. Moving more can help you feel better too, and keep your weight under control.

Don't have 30 minutes to exercise? Try three 10 minute chunks of moderate activity throughout the day, but do it five days a week. Make it fun and you will be more likely to stick with it. Here are a few ideas that require little time or money to help you get the exercise and, in turn, the health you need:

- ◆ Music—Walk to it, dance to it—alone, with a friend, or with your children 
- ◆ Jump rope—buy your child one and join in
- ◆ Sneak it into your work day—get a co-worker to walk or take the stairs more
- ◆ Shopping—park farther away or take an extra lap around the mall before you go home
- ◆ New attitude—a little positive thinking can go a long way 
- ◆ Try, try, try to find a friend to walk with—the pleasure of spending time and talking with a friend is a powerful incentive
- ◆ Visit Michigan's Surgeon General's web site, www.Michiganstepsup.org for great tips and tools on how to move more and eat better.