

Preventing Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases

Missouri's Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan

2005



The Problem

Obesity is one of the most serious health issues facing society today. Obesity has grown at such an alarming rate during the past two decades, it is considered a national epidemic. In Missouri, more than one in five adults are obese, and more than half of adults are overweight, which can lead to obesity. In 2002, more than 23 percent of Missourians over the age of 18 were obese, an increase of 95 percent since 1990 (*Figure 1*).

Obesity attacks the well-being of millions of people every year. It is a contributing factor in some of the most devastating and disabling diseases – diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and several types of cancer. Obesity is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Nationwide, an estimated 112,000 premature deaths a year may be attributed to obesity. The stark reality is excess weight means an increase in the risk of early death.

Obesity is a complex problem with numerous causes and consequences:

- **It is an expensive epidemic.** Obesity costs Missouri thousands of lives and well over a billion dollars every year. In 1998, direct health care costs attributed to adult obesity totaled \$1.6 billion.
- **It contributes to many illnesses.** People who are overweight or obese are frequently plagued by serious and long-lasting health concerns. Both physical and mental health are affected.
- **It can decrease quality of life.** In some cases, overweight and obese people have a diminished quality of life due to health concerns, discrimination and difficulty or inability to participate in certain activities.
- **It is often misunderstood.** Overweight and obesity are not simply a result of eating too much, although poor eating habits are often a contributing factor. The problems are caused by a number of factors that are often interrelated. According to the American Obesity Association, behavior, environment and genetics are all part of the overweight and obesity equation.

“Overweight and obesity must be approached as preventable and treatable problems with realistic and exciting opportunities to improve health and save lives.” – *U.S. Surgeon General, 2001*

The Plan

Missourians live in an environment that promotes poor eating habits and discourages physical activity in daily routines.

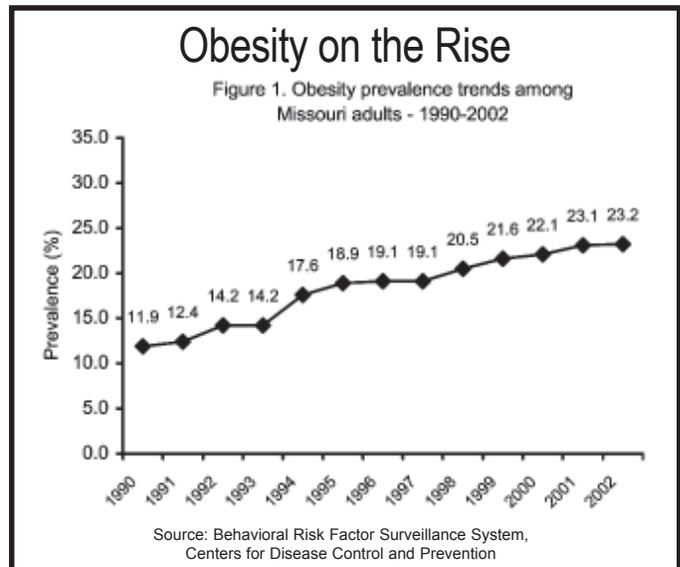
Because obesity is one of the most serious health problems facing society today, all Missourians must take action to help end this epidemic.

To guide this effort, Missouri has developed a strategic plan to combat the state's obesity problem. The plan was created by the Missouri Council on the Prevention and Management of Overweight and Obesity with input from Missouri residents who attended six public meetings held throughout the state and commented via the Internet. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is facilitating the development and implementation of the plan.

The plan addresses the need to increase physical activity levels, improve dietary intake, increase the effectiveness of the health care system in obesity prevention and treatment and strengthen health-related policies in Missouri.

The framework of the plan is based on approaches defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as essential to winning the battle against obesity. The CDC encourages promoting activities found to be effective in all areas that influence people's behaviors, including environmental and policy changes.

The plan includes goals, strategies and actions that Missouri can use to improve the health of its residents. The plan focuses on five main areas: families, communities, schools, health care services and public policy.



Within those areas, some of the specific actions include:

- Support family-focused community activities that provide healthy nutrition and physical activity opportunities.
- Help schools and child care facilities identify resources to assist families with children at risk for obesity.
- Recognize successful approaches used by employers that enable employees to improve nutrition, physical activity and breastfeeding practices.
- Provide training, resources and assistance to schools, child care facilities, families, communities and employers.
- Provide supports for primary health care settings to address obesity risks in early stages.
- Inform public officials about the health and economic costs of obesity.

The goals, strategies and actions detailed in Missouri's plan have been developed to ease the burden of obesity and help Missourians lead longer, healthier lives.

The complete plan, *Preventing Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases: Missouri's Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan*, can be found at: www.dhss.mo.gov



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