

Eat Smart and Move More to Combat Arthritis

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The statistics are alarming. In the recent publication *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America, 2007*, North Carolina was ranked 17th in the nation in adult obesity.¹ In fact, nearly 2 out of 3 older North Carolinians (aged 65 years and above) are either overweight or obese. This excess weight has enormous health implications for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and, yes, arthritis.

Arthritis is often overshadowed by other conditions related to obesity, but the fact remains that 70.4% of obese North Carolinians over the age of 65 years have been diagnosed with arthritis. In comparison, only 49.8% of our state's older citizens who are considered normal weight or underweight have been diagnosed with this disease.²

These numbers make it clear: we cannot address arthritis without addressing the issue of weight.

Obesity is considered a risk factor for arthritis and can exacerbate already existing conditions. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence of arthritis increases as weight does. Maintaining a healthy weight can help prevent onset and help slow the progression of this condition. Persons who are overweight or obese are also more likely to incur activity limitations due to arthritis. In North Carolina, of those 65 years and older who have been diagnosed with arthritis and are also obese, 46.5% report that their activity is limited by joint pain. On the other hand, only 32.6% of normal and underweight persons report such limitations.² However, even a small weight loss can have a significant positive impact. Research has shown that losing only 11 pounds can reduce the incidence of knee arthritis.³

Ironically, one of the key behaviors to weight management also has positive outcomes for arthritis. Physical activity not

only helps with weight loss and maintenance, but regular activity also has been shown to improve the health of muscles and bones, reduce pain, and increase flexibility of joints and ease of movement. Despite these health benefits, in North Carolina only 1 in 3 adults over the age of 65 years who have been diagnosed with arthritis achieve the recommended amounts of physical activity.²

Eat Smart, Move More...NC is a statewide movement to reduce the rising tide of obesity and related chronic disease among North Carolinians by helping them to eat smart, move more, and achieve a healthy weight. The *Eat Smart, Move More...NC* Leadership Team representing over 40 academic, government, nonprofit, health care, and private organizations helps to guide the movement and ensure that healthy eating and physical activity choices become easier to make in North Carolina.

The *Eat Smart, Move More...NC* Leadership Team executive committee provides guidance to the leadership team and includes chairs of the various committees. Greg Griggs, MPA, CAE, from the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, serves as chair of the leadership team. Carolyn Dunn, PhD, of North Carolina State University and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, assists as vice chair. Dave Gardner, DA, of WakeMed Health and Hospitals, leads the advocacy committee in its efforts to recommend legislation, regulations, policies, and funding to enhance physical activity and healthy eating in North Carolina. The communications committee is headed by Patrick Gibbons of RTI International. This committee is responsible for communicating the need for physical activity and healthy eating opportunities particularly as they relate to policy and environmental change.

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Through *Eat Smart, Move More...NC* citizens gain knowledge, resources, and support needed to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. A consumer Web site at www.MyEatSmartMoveMore.com provides tools and tips for incorporating good nutrition and physical activity into daily life. Advertisements on billboards, in print media, and on the radio and television encourage North Carolinians of all ages to spend less time in front of the television

and computer, be active every day, drink fewer sugar-sweetened beverages, prepare more meals at home, decrease portion sizes, and eat more fruits and vegetables. These messages serve as a reminder of how simple changes in daily lifestyle can have a large impact on weight management.

Eat Smart, Move More...NC increases healthy eating and physical activity opportunities wherever North Carolinians live, learn, earn, play, and pray. In order to make healthy behaviors the norm, rather than the exception, appropriate policies and environmental changes must be put into place at both the state and local level to encourage eating smart and moving more. Examples of these policies and environmental changes include creating healthy worksites or faith communities that encourage and facilitate these behaviors as well as building walking trails and greenways that provide opportunity for moving more.

Helping our citizens reach a healthy weight and maintain healthy eating and physical activity behaviors will have a profound impact on the health of our state. Eating smart and moving more also may be key to addressing the incidence and severity of arthritis in North Carolina. **NCMJ**

REFERENCES

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