

Working Together for Better Health & Weight Control

Patricia Dziuba, Georgia Jennings and I are writing to ask for your help in improving the nutrition, physical activity, weight and health of Valley residents. Georgia Jennings is the deputy director of the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center. Ms. Dziuba is a community member, who after some struggle, has been successful in her own efforts to improve her nutrition, her physical activity, her weight, and her health. She believes that what she has done, others can do-and she wants to help them. Responding to an earlier column, Pat came to meet with us at the PRC to try to develop a plan together. I'll discuss some of the issues, and end by reiterating that we need your help.

The Prevention Research Center has a particular interest in nutrition, physical activity, and weight control. There are many good reasons for this. The combination of physical inactivity and poor diet either has, or soon will, overtake tobacco use as the leading cause of preventable (premature) death in the United States. Obesity is considered perhaps the most out-of-control public health problem in the nation. So, an organization interested in health promotion and disease prevention almost has to be interested in these issues.

In addition, changing diet, physical activity, and/or weight is very difficult. When something is difficult, it is deserving of extra attention. The PRC is conducting several studies related to nutrition and weight, and has several in the works related to physical activity. While we are learning a lot from our work, and the work of others, we readily acknowledge that we have so much more to learn. The means of helping people achieve good

nutritional health, and regular physical activity remain elusive.

Because there is so much frustration dealing with these issues, many people look for an easy solution. One of the potential "easy" solutions is a fad diet. The Atkins' diet is an example. This diet is popular not because it is healthful, or effective, or even safe. But because people who have tried so many other ways to improve their nutrition and weight without success want to try something new. It's just human nature.

There is very little in our environment that helps us achieve the nutrition and physical activity we need for optimal health. Fast food restaurants make fatty food convenient, inexpensive, and tasty. High calorie snack foods jam every vending machine. TV commercials encourage indulgence. And energy-saving devices from elevators to e-mail to drive-through restaurants encourage inactivity. So, we live in a "toxic" environment insofar as nutrition, physical activity, and weight control are concerned.

Despite that, Ms. Dziuba believes, and so do I, that a health-promoting lifestyle is achievable. She has the evidence of her own experience. But the means of sharing that success are not immediately obvious. Here's where your help comes in.

With Pat as the project leader, we would like to convene a group of community members interested in working to improve nutrition, activity, and weight control among Valley residents. We plan to start by holding discussions



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at the PRC. Once we have agreement on methods and settings, we would like to use the resources of the PRC to support a grass-roots program, perhaps conducted mostly in workplaces, to achieve the program goals. We plan to rely heavily on the guidance of the community group, so if you volunteer to get involved, you will be telling us what to do. We certainly will listen.

If willing to join Ms. Dziuba in this commendable and much needed effort, please call 732-1265, or send an e-mail to cats@yalegriffinprc.org. Thank you.

David L. Katz, MD, MPH
Preventive Medicine Column

Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center
130 Division Street · Derby, Connecticut 06418
Main: 203-732-1A0K (1265)
E mail: CATS@yalegriffinprc.org
Website: www.yalegriffinprc.org

