Obesity—A National Epidemic

Obesity continues to be on the rise with more than one third of U.S. adults—more than 72 million people—and 16% of U.S. children are obese. Since 1980, obesity rates for adults have doubled and rates for children have tripled. Obesity rates among all groups in society, including people with disabilities, have increased markedly.¹

Health Consequences of Obesity

Obesity has physical, psychological, and social consequences in adults and children. Children and adolescents are developing obesity-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, that were once seen only in adults. Obese children are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and abnormal glucose tolerance. Adults with obesity tend to have a higher risk for coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, stroke, liver and gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, osteoarthritis, and gynecological problems.¹

People with disabilities have higher tendencies to be overweight and obese than the general population. In addition to weight problems, people with disabilities also have higher incidence of other secondary conditions that are associated with health risks of obesity. People with disabilities are at an even greater risk and it is essential to have the opportunities to lead a healthy lifestyle.

North Dakota Facts and Trends

The reality we face in North Dakota is that obesity is on the rise. In recent years, nearly 62% of all North Dakotans and 70% of North Dakotans with disabilities report being overweight or obese.²

Sources:
Early Riser for an Active Lifestyle

Several mornings each week Dawn Olson is up at 4:00 am. She drives about 15 minutes to the Minot YMCA to swim. Amazingly, the only things that occasionally get in her way are sub-zero temperatures and snow packed or icy roads. These can be obstacles because Dawn is not driving to the YMCA in a car, she is using her power wheelchair.

Born with Cerebral Palsy, Dawn decided at a young age that she was not going to let her disability stand in the way of leading a healthy lifestyle. With the encouragement of her doctor and family she learned the value of being active and that it could be fun. Prior to beginning a regular swimming routine, Dawn was taking medications for joint pain as well as receiving physical therapy. Currently swimming on a regular basis (weather permitting!), Dawn no longer needs medication or physical therapy. In addition to the physical benefits, Dawn states that being physically active has also improved her mental outlook on life. “I do this for my head (mental health), as much as I do it for my body”.

Dawn acknowledges that it is not easy for her to exercise, but it’s a conscious choice she has made, “getting up at 4 o’clock in the morning is not fun, but the feeling I get when I am done swimming... that is what keeps me going.” There are no sidewalks in Dawn’s neighborhood which is just East of Dakota Square mall, so she is forced to maneuver through the streets as she makes her way to the YMCA. Dawn also acknowledges the support she receives from lifeguards at the YMCA who assist with things such as getting her life jacket on and off. The YMCA also has accessible sinks, showers, and dressing areas that make it possible for Dawn to use their facility.

In addition to regular exercise, Dawn also watches the scale very closely and follows a nutritional food program in order to maintain a healthy weight. Even though it isn’t always easy, Dawn recognizes that by living a healthy lifestyle she can minimize the effects her disability has on her life.

Resources:
The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability (NCPAD).
The mission of the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability (NCPAD) is to promote substantial health benefits that can be gained from participating in regular physical activity. This site provides information and resources that can enable people with disabilities to become as physically active as they choose to be, visit www.ncpad.org

The ND Disability Health Project can provide technical assistance to assist with health promotion, staff training and education, and disability awareness. Contact us at 800.233.1737 or visit our website at www.ndcpd.org/health

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Vision:
All people in ND have access to information and services they need to maintain good health and wellness. There are no health disparities between people with and without disabilities that are based solely on the presence of a disability.

Pay It Forward…..
Pass it on to others who may find this information helpful.

Health-related information provided in this fact sheet is for informational purposes only and should not replace advice from a medical professional. The ND Disability Health Project is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through a grant (1 U59 DD00278-01) to the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities at Minot State University. Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the CDC.