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Child Obesity Grows Faster In Rural Areas

In the mountains of Western Pennsylvania and in other rural communities like it, many health officials say the tide of obesity is rising faster than anywhere else.

And new research appears to back them up, dispelling a long-held belief that in farm communities and other rural towns, heavy chores, wide expanses of land and fresh air make leaner, stronger bodies.

"Whatever the situation was, rural areas are leading the way now ... they're ahead of the curve," said Michael Meit, director of the University of Pittsburgh Center for Rural Health Practice. "Something's happened."

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania released a study recently that used state health figures to compare the body-mass index of seventh-graders in urban and rural communities -- more than 25,000 students in all.

About 16 percent of urban students qualified as obese, according to the study, which is in line with national average for children ages 6-19. In rural school districts, however, 20 percent of students were considered obese.

More alarmingly, researchers found that during the years of the survey, between 1999 and 2001, the number of obese students in rural school districts rose about 5 percent, more than twice the rate of their urban counterparts. The same trends are being reported from New Mexico to Michigan to West Virginia.

In Michigan, children in rural areas were 3 percent to 9 percent more likely to be obese, researchers found. In rural North Carolina children had a 50 percent greater chance of being obese.

Mostly rural states have done studies that

don't distinguish between urban and rural children, but they have found the incidence of childhood obesity to be far greater than the national average.

More than a quarter of all fifth-graders in West Virginia are obese, where two-thirds of the population is rural. One in four public school children in Arkansas are obese.



Dr. Darrell Ellsworth, director of cardiovascular disease research at the Windber Research Institute is trying to start a childhood obesity clinic to stave off a wave of diabetes and heart disease he believes will overwhelm this region if nothing is done. In a room with 14 children doing aerobic exercise at the Windber Medical Center, he nodded toward the teens and adolescents, saying they will have a much higher rate of disease than their parents or grandparents.

Researchers are not ready to point a finger at any one culprit for rural obesity, but they have some theories. For one thing, with fewer family farms and more mechanization, children are not burning many calories, but they're still eating high-calorie meals.

The Center for Health Promotion at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine, where Holm is senior scientist, is following about 500 third- to fifth-graders over three years with hopes of finding a pattern.

Fewer farmers does not explain why Windber, a former coal-mining town named after a coal-mining company, would have the same problem.

One connection might be found in the satellite dishes, computers and game consoles that have popped up in almost every town,

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Harvest Blend Regular

- Carrots
- Crunchy Sprout Mix
- Green Kale
- Italian Parsley
- Jewell Sweet Potatoes
- Red Beets
- Roma Tomatoes
- Sweet Onions
- Watercress
- Ataulfo Mango
- Cameo Apples
- Kiwi
- Royal Mandarins
- Valencia Oranges

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

Route Changes Coming

For the first time in two years, we're planning on making changes to the layouts of our routes in the coming weeks.

We will contact each of you who will be affected by the change before we switch over, but a quick summary:

1. Tuesday deliveries in Oviedo, Chuluota, and Winter Springs, as well as some parts of downtown Sanford will be moved to a new Wednesday delivery.
2. Thursday deliveries in Winter Springs, Oviedo, and other deliveries near the 417 will be moved to Wednesday as well.
3. Thursday deliveries downtown will be moved to Tuesdays.

We apologize if the changes inconvenience anyone, but we feel they are necessary to continue serving you at the same level of quality. Please call if you have any questions.

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regardless of the region's economic engine. The same technology is found in cities and suburbs, but health officials say it arrived later and spread much more rapidly in rural areas, changing behavior dramatically in a very short time.

The only other place where researchers are finding obesity rates similar to rural America is in the poorest, most troubled urban neighborhoods, suggesting that poverty may be the overriding cause.

In Tioga County in northeast Pennsylvania, where farming has declined and poverty has risen to about 20 percent, one in 10 kindergartners were found to be obese in 2001-2002. That number doubled for eighth-graders.

Wellsboro Area High School, the largest in the county with 580 students, will alter physical education next year to allow student choices: sports team-oriented, wellness classes, and traditional gym classes.

Ray Crawford, who is 16, lifts weights year-round in preparation for football season. Round-faced and 5-foot-9, he looks every bit the lineman he is for the Windber Ramblers. Now he says he'll also take up cardiovascular exercise, along with the weight-lifting.

"I've started trying to take it easy on the junk food," he says. Crawford's father died of heart disease about eight years ago. He was 45.

Recipes

Ravioli In Sweet Potato Sauce

- 1 tbsp margarine
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large diced sweet potato
- 1 cup low-fat milk or soy milk
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 pound spinach or tri-color cheese tortellini or ravioli
- fresh parsley

Heat the margarine in a medium saucepan. Add the onion and garlic and sauté over medium-low heat until golden. Add the diced sweet potato and just enough water to cover. Bring to a simmer, then cover and simmer gently until the sweet potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

Transfer the mixture from the saucepan to a food processor. Add the remaining sauce ingredients and process until smoothly pureed (or simply puree in the saucepan using an immersion blender). Transfer back to the saucepan and set aside, covered, off the heat.

Cook the tortellini in plenty of rapidly simmering water until al dente. Drain, then stir them into the sweet potato sauce. Heat gently and briefly, just until well heated through. Serve, garnishing each serving with some parsley.

Beet Salad with Parsley Vinaigrette

- 1 bunch red beets, diced
- 2 cups shiitake mushrooms, julienned
- 1 cup frisee, cleaned
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 bunch parsley
- 1/2 cup of Dijon vinaigrette
- ice water
- olive oil
- salt and pepper

Boil beets until tender. Cool and peel. Cut into large diced pieces and combine with minced shallot. Dress with 1 oz. of the vinaigrette, salt and pepper. Julienne shiitake mushrooms and sauté in olive oil. Season, cool and set aside. Blanch parsley for ten sec-

onds and cool in ice water. Puree parsley in blender, adding in water until puree is smooth. Season and set aside. Combine frisee and beet mixture and place on plate. Garnish with mushrooms. Whisk remaining vinaigrette into parsley puree and spoon around plate.

Corn and Kale Skillet Cakes

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup fine yellow cornmeal
- 1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 2 cups fresh or thawed frozen corn
- 2 cups finely chopped, firmly packed kale
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tbsp melted butter or olive oil
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup diced onion
- Butter or oil for frying

In a large bowl, mix the flour, cornmeal, salt, corn and kale. In a medium bowl, lightly beat the eggs, melted butter or oil, and milk to combine. Pour wet ingredients into dry and mix briefly. Heat butter or oil in a large frying pan. Add the onion and saute until golden. Add the sautéed onion to the batter, mix again, then drop about 1/4 cup batter per cake into the hot skillet, adding more oil or butter as needed to keep cakes from sticking. Cook until cakes begin to bubble, about 3 minutes, then flip and cook until the other side is golden, 1 or 2 minutes longer.

Roasted Sweet Potatoes & Onions

- 2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut in 1-inch chunks
- 2 medium sweet onions, cut in 1-inch chunks
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1/4 cup amaretto liqueur
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds, toasted

Heat oven to 425 degrees F. Toss first 6 ingredients in a shallow medium-sized baking dish. Cover; bake 30 minutes. Uncover; bake 20 minutes more. Sprinkle with almonds before serving.