HEALTH & NUTRITION—Encouraging healthy living through workshops, virtual world

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MORE THAN HALF OF AMERICANS TODAY SUFFER one or more chronic diseases that contribute to skyrocketing medical expenses for both families and governments. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that modifying just four behaviors could end most chronic diseases—eat healthier foods, do more physical activity, quit smoking, and trim alcohol use.

University of Idaho Extension specialists and educators do their part, working hard to use state and federal funds plus grant money to help Idaho adults and children who battle a range of chronic health issues. Of special concern are people on food stamps—the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—for people who often can’t afford healthcare.

**Stretching food-stamp dollars.** UI Extension educators train paraprofessionals to teach and advise residents from elementary school age to senior citizens on ways to improve their nutrition and health. Program focus includes stretching food dollars while making healthier choices and adding more physical activity. UI Extension family and consumer sciences educators and specialists in most Idaho counties run these programs with the help of federal funds: Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Programs (EFNEP), Extension Nutrition Programs (ENP), and Senior ENP (SENP).

**Help for seniors, biggest losers, etc.:** In North Idaho, more than 900 participants have taken Healthy Eating with Diabetes with 78% reporting they are more physically active and 93% reporting they are following a healthier, diabetic-friendly diet. In Idaho County since 2009, 600 men and women have participated in UI Extension’s annual Biggest Loser Weight Loss Challenge. Combined, they lost 2,357 pounds, (average 2.8% body fat per person). Ada County classes have stressed eating healthier grains and how to make bread from whole grains.

**Health ed goes virtual.** A new virtual reality program aims to help Idaho residents get clear on which practices are healthy and which are not via computer game-like simulations accessible at www.webpages.uidaho.edu/sl/, Intrepid Healthy Lifestyle Hunter, now being beta tested with Idaho high school students, lets learners make virtual lifestyle choices. Funded by the Idaho State Board of Education, the simulation also has a money/finance module. Creating it are faculty from UI Extension, the School of Family and Consumer Sciences, the College of Art and Architecture’s Virtual Technology and Design, and the College of Business and Economics.

**Boosting women’s strength in 6 weeks**

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Can strength training twice a week improve people’s health and daily abilities?

Yes, believes the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It set a goal for 30% of American adults in the U.S. to weight train twice a week to retain muscle mass and reduce fall-related injuries compared to adults who do not work with weights twice a week.

A 2004 National Health Interview Survey—the most recent—finds only 22% of men and 18% of women complied in 2004. To see whether even a 6-week, 12-class course could make a difference, University of Idaho Extension family and consumer sciences educators delivered the Strong Women Stay Young program—developed at Tufts University—in 11 Idaho counties with 244 women aged 32 to 89. Most were strength-training novices.

Twice each week the women devoted 45 minutes to exercising with weights and 15 minutes to discussing nutrition. They came mainly because of health problems—obesity, osteoporosis, arthritis, fibromyalgia, diabetes, back pain, and depression.

**Results:** Surveys show most of the participants became more active, even branching off into golf, kayaking, hiking, and walking more. Their arm and leg strengths increased by 40% to 80%.

Most participants reported they ate healthier—reduced portions, drank more water, and started eating breakfast. “I can lift my 30-pound granddaughter now and I can move bales of hay,” said one. “My doctor is pleased with the results, too,” said another.

These and other health-related workshops are ongoing through nearly all UI Extension county offices.

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**Robots help UI dietetics students in North Idaho**

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**Simulation robots** that talk back are helping University of Idaho dietetics students gain experience with problems like cardiac care and renal failure.

The novel approach to clinical education is proving its worth as the third group of dietetics students progress through their clinical rotations in hospitals across southern Idaho and the Idaho Panhandle this spring. The robots exercises are a cooperative effort with North Idaho College.

Shifting from humans to simulation robots in 2010 allowed Coeur d’Alene-based dietetics faculty to intensify students’ clinical training, said SeAnne Safai, an associate professor of dietetics there. The program is in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences’ School of Family and Consumer Sciences.

“This is a national trend, but we’re one of the rare educational programs at the present with standards and protocols in place,” Safai said. She is studying the effects on students’ educational progress and last fall presented a report about the efforts to the National Dietetics Association conference in San Diego.

“Student sessions are watched live by the preceptors [training staff] through cameras. As students exit the ‘patient’s’ room, they are debriefed about what they did correctly, what they could have done better, and student reaction to the experience. The benefit of simulation is in the debriefing sessions,” Safai said. Students explore seven of a hospital dietitian’s most common medical cases.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

237,874

The number of Idaho residents receiving food stamps in 2012.

That’s 15% of Idaho’s population and up from 87,104 recipients in 2007 before the economic crash—a 173% increase in four years.