



Yo-yo dieting drives up obesity

Dieting is not the answer to the nation's obesity problem (see page 12), according to Joanne Ikeda, extension nutrition specialist at UC Berkeley. For many extremely overweight people, repeated dieting contributes to their weight gain.

Ikeda surveyed 149 women who weighed between 200 and 600 pounds about their lifetime dieting practices. Contrary to the popular public belief that fat people make little effort to lose weight, she found that 60% of the women had dieted more than 11 times, and this figure increased to 83% for women at the highest weights.

"The first time, they will lose a significant amount of weight, then regain a few pounds more than they lost. The second time it will be more difficult to lose weight. They won't lose as much as the first time. The weight regain will be faster and greater than the first weight regain," Ikeda says.

The \$30-billion diet industry encourages overweight people to keep on trying to lose weight and many continue the frustrating yo-yo pattern believing that eventually they will succeed. However, Ikeda said, research shows that few do.

"My concern is that one of the things driving up the obesity rate is weight loss and regain in these individuals," she says. "I think that once people have tried to lose weight three times and regained the weight each time, they should be encouraged to stop dieting before their weight goes even higher."

Ikeda says the focus should shift to health at every size. She recommends that overweight women exercise regularly and eat nutrient-dense foods amounting to approximately 1,800 calories per day. Such a plan will satisfy hunger with three reasonable meals plus snacks, in contrast to typical weight-loss diets of 1,200 to 1,400 calories per day.

"The goal is weight maintenance, not weight loss," Ikeda says. "This strategy will reduce the risk for chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke."

Ikeda found the subjects for her study by collaborating with the Sacramento-based National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, and sending messages to mailing lists that reach overweight women. Complete results of Ikeda's research will be published in 2004 in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. — *Jeannette Warnert*



Rather than dieting, obese women should focus on exercising and eating healthy, nutrient-dense foods.

ting in the garden pulling weeds uses more calories than watching television."

The nine-lesson classroom curriculum includes topics such as reading food labels, eating at fast-food restaurants and understanding the media's influence. Students track their eating and fitness progress, and receive motivating incentives such as raffle tickets and prizes. The lessons are correlated to California Department of Education standards.

Teachers can obtain the curriculum at <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu> or UC Cooperative Extension offices, and receive training and support from UC nutrition advisors. For information, call (530) 754 8051 or go to <http://groups.ucanr.org/efnep/youth/index.cfm>.

— *Jeannette Warnert and Janet Byron*

Sustainable ag lectures online

A major lecture series at UC Davis, "The Science of Sustainable Agriculture: Measuring the Immeasurable," which included 17 internationally recognized experts on sustainability in relation to agriculture, the environment and society, is available online.

Sustainable agriculture has stimulated public debate about where food comes from and the interplay of food production, food security (see pages 12, 18) and the protection of human and natural resources. "University research and education play a key role in assessing and increasing the sustainability of the food and agricultural systems," said Neal Van Alfen, dean of the UC Davis College of Agriculture and Environmental Studies, a major funder of the series.

The series began last April and continued every Friday afternoon through the fall. Speakers included experts in nutrition, biodiversity, climate change and organic farming from around the nation and world.

For more information, go to: www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/seminar/.