

Eatfit guides adolescents to improve health and fitness

A hip new program called “EatFit” is helping adolescents to change their eating and exercising habits using “guided goal-setting,” a new tool developed by UC nutrition specialists and advisors.

EatFit includes a teen-oriented magazine, interactive Web site and school curriculum designed for 11- to 15-year-olds. The message is one of dietary moderation and common-sense fitness, a critical component of addressing the growing prevalence of obesity among youth and adults (see page 12). Instead of setting their own goals, which is usually unrealistic for middle-school-age children, the program guides them toward achievable lifestyle and habit changes.

About 120 middle schools are using the curriculum, as well as after-school programs and camps, with an estimated 15,000 children participating in 2003.

One evaluation of the program, to be published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (January-February 2004), found that 74% and 79% of 8th graders participating in EatFit made at least one positive change in their dietary and physical activity behaviors, respectively.

To develop the materials, UC researchers conducted interviews with children and their teachers.

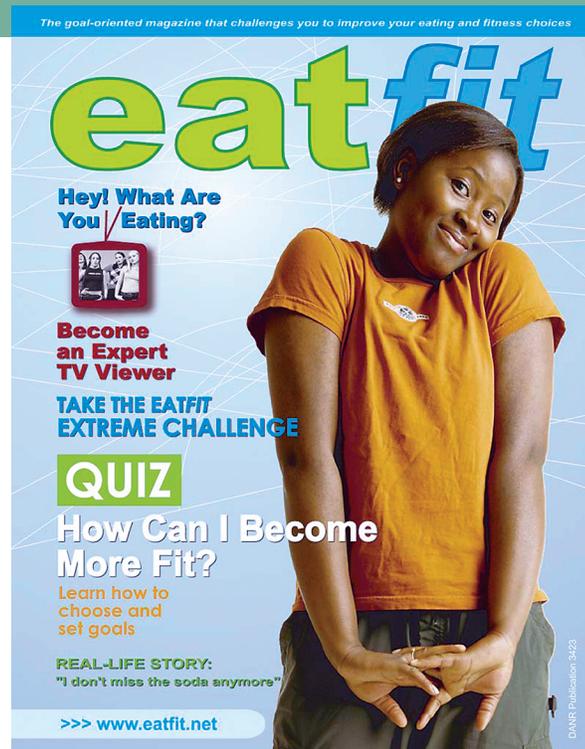
About 120 middle schools are using the curriculum.

“We found out that we needed to be hip,” says Marilyn Townsend, UC Davis nutrition specialist and leader of the EatFit group. “That’s why we went with the magazine format for kids. They also told us that they wanted a computer component.”

The 20-page magazine and workbook incorporates elements you might find in *Seventeen* or *Teen People*: “fab features,” quizzes, lively colors, skateboards, food and irreverent facial expressions.

The Web site, www.eatfit.net, includes recipes and success stories that provide fun ways to gather information and get motivated, plus an innovative online analysis to help teens evaluate how they currently eat and determine healthy goals. Users type in the foods they ate in a 24-hour period. The site helps narrow down specifics on types of food and serving sizes, then gives a brief analysis and offers two goals for making the diet healthier. The teen selects one, and then is given a selection of small habit changes to help achieve that goal.

“We know that eating too much refined sugar is an issue with kids, and that girls aren’t getting



enough calcium,” says Marcel Horowitz, a researcher on the project. “We present those as goal options. They may not choose them, but once they learn the process and experience success, they might be willing to look at another area in their diets that would be beneficial to change.”

The researchers used goal options in the Web site that students themselves suggested. “We asked kids, ‘If you were going to increase calcium, how would you go about it?’” Townsend says. As a result, users may choose to drink the milk leftover in their cereal bowls three times per week as one goal option.

“Instead of saying ‘drink more milk,’ we made each minor goal specific, challenging and something they can do right away,” Townsend says. “If we let the kids set their own goals, they tended to be too general, too easy or too difficult.”

Developed by Horowitz and recent UC Davis Ph.D. graduate Mical Shilts, the EatFit magazine provides analyses for four areas of physical activity: aerobic, stretching, strength and lifestyle. Each has major and minor goal options for students to select, depending on their interests.

“The lifestyle area is where we hope to have the greatest impact on obesity,” Horowitz says. “We offer options for things people can do consistently that don’t require the motivation necessary to participate in organized fitness sessions.”

The idea is to make physical activity a part of everyday life.

“We teach them they don’t need to find a parking place close to the door,” Horowitz says. “Instead of riding the elevator, they can take the stairs. Just sit-



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/.