



Champions for bringing healthy choices to life.

A CASE REPORT:

**WE CAN!
ENERGIZE OUR FAMILIES**



THE PROBLEM

Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Now, one in every three children in the United States is overweight or obese. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents ages 2-19 are obese. Obese children are more likely to become obese adults leading to chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes and asthma. The American Heart Association (AHA) now reports that childhood obesity is the number one health concern among parents in the United States, topping drug abuse and smoking.

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Childhood obesity is the result of eating too many calories and not getting enough physical activity. Environmental factors that make it difficult for children to make healthy food choices and get enough physical activity include:

- Sugary drinks and less healthy foods on school campuses
- Advertising of less healthy foods
- Lack of daily, quality physical activity in all schools
- Unsafe places to play or be active
- Limited access to healthy affordable foods
- Television and media (TV, computers, video games, cell phones, etc.)



THE SOLUTION

Research shows that parents and caregivers are the primary influence on children 8-13 years old. Parents are important role models for their children. If parents are unhealthy, children are likely to also be unhealthy. Unfortunately, parents do not always recognize when their child has a weight problem, especially if the parents themselves are overweight.

Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center partnered with Capital BlueCross to provide *We Can! Energize Our Families*, a free evidence-based program to educate parents on ways to help children maintain a healthy weight. *We Can!* (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition) is a national movement designed to provide parents, caregivers and entire communities with tools, fun activities, and more, to help encourage healthy eating, increase physical activity and reduce time sitting in front of the screen (TV, computer, cell phone). The program, a collaboration of four institutes of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), provides science-based educational programs and support materials, including tips and worksheets, designed to help families stay healthy.

"Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents."

– Former Surgeon General, Richard Carmona



The PRO Wellness Center facilitated four six-week sessions from January 2013 through June 2013. Parents and children attended a one-hour session for a total of six weeks. During each hour session, Capital BlueCross health educators utilized the *We Can!* curriculum to encourage parents and youth to :

- Increase the availability and accessibility of healthy foods in the home
- Enjoy small portions at home and at restaurants
- Limit the availability and accessibility of sweetened beverages, high-fat foods and energy-dense foods with low nutrient value
- Support and enable family physical activity
- Support and enable reduced screen time

Additionally, children spent each session throughout the six week program with a personal trainer participating in active play and physical activity. Children learned how to get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity through free, fun and family-friendly activities like jumping rope, taking walks, and playing games.

THE RESULTS

Parents who participated in the *We Can!* program completed a pre and post questionnaire to gauge what the participants knew about eating, physical activity and screen time and how these behaviors affect energy balance and weight maintenance. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the curricula and not the parents. Parent program participants completed this on the first and last day of class. Data analysis on results from the pre and post questionnaires revealed a significant (positive) change with regards to the following:

- Being more active on one day can NOT help balance extra calories consumed on another day
- Balancing the calories that I get from eating with moderate levels of physical activity is easy to do
- When shopping for food, I use the Nutrition Facts Label to make my choices
- In my family, we try to make sure that foods with added sugar are not easily available at home

Additionally, a majority of the parents reported that the program had a positive impact on themselves, their child(ren), and their family.



STAY CONNECTED



LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW WE CAN HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION:

email: PROwellness@hmc.psu.edu

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www.pennstatehershey.org/PROwellness



ABOUT PENN STATE HERSHEY PRO WELLNESS CENTER

Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center helps Pennsylvania communities live healthier lives using evidence-based strategies for measurable and sustainable results. Historically focused on childhood obesity prevention, the Center has helped children and their families eat well, engage in regular physical activity and incorporate healthy habits into their everyday lives since 2003.

Our approach of Prevention, Research and Outreach provides schools, communities and like-minded organizations with educational programs, technical assistance, collaborative partnerships and access to proven wellness interventions.

PREVENTION

The Center provides an evidence-based approach to understanding and reducing the risks of childhood obesity. We facilitate proven interventions and capacity building, and offer technical assistance and hands-on project management to overcome obstacles that prevent access to healthy alternatives. In addition to educating and inspiring people to make healthy choices, the Center focuses on environmental and lifestyle changes that remove barriers and increase access to healthy behaviors where we learn, work, play and live.

RESEARCH

We recognize the importance of integrating research, evidence and data into our programs to ensure value and credibility to those we serve.

OUTREACH

We strive to educate and inspire youth and families to incorporate healthy lifestyle choices daily. Our outreach efforts include increasing public awareness through regional event participation as well as providing various materials related to nutrition, physical activity and other obesity related issues.



*PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION • ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION
CAPACITY BUILDING • TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE • COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
TRAINING • ACCESS TO PROVEN WELLNESS INTERVENTIONS*



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