



Alabamians Gear Up for Fourth Statewide Weight-loss Campaign

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Over the last four years, Alabamians have lost almost 500,000 pounds, but according to health experts, that's just a drop in the bucket when considering the state's problem with obesity. Recent reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention peg Alabama's adults as the second most obese in the nation, a ranking that had dropped to third, but quickly inched back up.

Organizations all across the state are waging war against this trend in a contest called Scale Back Alabama. The 10-week, weight-loss competition is in its fourth year of encouraging the state's adults to exercise more and eat less.

"We began this contest with Alabama's hospitals four years ago," said Dr. Donald Williamson, State Health Officer. "And while it's a fairly major undertaking, there's no time to let up. A recent update from the CDC provided information on obesity rates by region, and we have some areas of the state with 36 to 48 percent of adults listed as obese, meaning their body mass index is more than 30."

The chairman of the campaign, Donald Jones a hospital CEO from north Alabama, claims hospital employees see firsthand the effects of obesity. "Patients come to us with advanced diabetes and heart disease, and we know they could have prevented much of the disease by being healthier," said Jones.

Scale Back Alabama targets adults in the workplace, with the goal of reaching the families as well. Campaign organizers stress the high cost of obesity not only to employees, but also to their employers pointing to statistics that show health care costs for obese workers are about 21 times higher than they are for employees in the normal weight range.

"It's critical that we have a healthy workforce in order to keep existing businesses viable and attract new ones," added Jones. "However, we also know that if we can get the adults to change their lifestyles, some of that will trickle down to their families."

Scale Back Alabama is sponsored by the Alabama Hospital Association and the Alabama Department of Public Health, with generous underwriting from Barber's Dairies and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama. Teams of four can register for the contest and weigh in during the week of Jan. 23 – 29 at any one of the hundreds of public weigh-in sites across the state. In addition, many businesses and other organizations will be hosting private weigh-ins for their employees. Participation in the contest is free, and all individuals that complete the contest and lose at least 10 pounds will be placed in drawings for cash prizes.

“I cannot emphasize the impact of losing a little weight,” stated Dr. Williamson. “It’s been proven that even a weight loss of 5 to 15 percent in an individual who is overweight or obese can reduce the risk of some diseases, particularly heart disease. We hear from Scale Back Alabama participants each year who have been able to cut back or even eliminate certain types of medicines thanks to their weight loss.”

One of last year’s successful participants, Julianna Lawson from Lawrence County, stated, “I never exercised and had a poor diet. Your program gave me the motivation to begin a healthy lifestyle. Today, I am fit and feel absolutely fabulous. But the most amazing thing is that I teach a free strength training program for women in my community with class members ages 15 to 89!”

For more information on signing up to participate, go to www.scalebackalabama.com.

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Key Findings from Survey of 2009 Participants

The following information comes from a survey of participants following last year’s event. More than 2,000 people answered the survey.

- Approximately half increased their daily intake of fruits and vegetables.
- 61% felt an increase in energy as a result of participating in Scale Back Alabama.
- More than 40 percent increased the number of days they exercised to 2 – 3 days per week.
- 53% increased the amount of water consumed per day and 57% increased their milk intake.
- 14% decreased their blood pressure, and 15% decreased their cholesterol levels.
- Best of all, 61% agreed to continue the changes they made for at least six months.