



Area residents gathered at Norris Park Thursday evening to take part in Walk this Weigh, a fitness program designed to reduce risk of diabetes and heart disease.

Teddy Snell /

April 25, 2008 09:55 am

For a healthier life

By **TEDDY SNELL**

TAHLEQUAH DAILY PRESS —

The weather may have been touch-and-go all day Thursday, but the skies cleared long enough during the evening for a group of area residents to take steps toward a healthier lifestyle. The Cherokee County Health Coalition and Health Department presented one of its quarterly "Walk this Weigh" events at Norris Park, and participants took a stroll up Muskogee Avenue to the Cherokee Courthouse square and back.

Early on, long before the appointed 5:30 p.m. start time, approximately 50 walkers and their children – and in some cases, even their dogs – lined up to register and to receive free goodies provided by Tahlequah Mainstreet Association, Cherokee Nation's Healthy Nation and the health department.

"We've got lots of giveaways this time," said Mainstreet Director Danny Perry, as he unloaded boxes of water bottles, pedometers and T-shirts.

According to Perry, Walk this Weigh events are usually held once every quarter, depending on the weather.

Walking is one of the easiest ways to get up, get active and begin some sort of exercise regimen. According to information provided by the health department, Cherokee County is high in incidents of heart disease, and walking often decreases that risk.

Compared with women who engage in no physical activity, women who walk as little as one hour a week – even at a gentle pace – had only about half the risk of coronary artery disease, according to information provided by CCHD. Women doing more vigorous exercise have an even lower risk.

Also, women who take 3- to 10-minute brisk walks, five days a week, have nearly the same increase in fitness levels as women who walk continuously for 30 minutes. In fact, those who walked in briefer sessions lost more weight and inches around the waist than those walking longer.

Tahlequah resident Wilma Roberts attended Thursday evening's event with her pet chihuahua in tow.

"Oh, we like walking," she said. "I was doing water aerobics until the NSU pool had to be repaired. Then, I joined a gym. Now that the pool is fixed, I guess I'll do both!"

Cherokee County SafeKids Coordinator Lynne McAllister was busy working the line, handing out pedometers and signing people in for the event.

When asked how long Walk this Weigh has been in place, she had to stop and think. The answer came to her when she looked down at the Walk this Weigh T-shirt she was wearing from the inaugural event in 2003. "Well, it looks like we've been doing this for five years!" she said, laughing. "I'm getting old. I need a T-shirt to help me remember!"

Josh Daily, County Health Coalition coordinator, passed out printed information to participants to help them work up a walking regimen.

"When everyone returns, we'll pass out information on the 20 percent Boost Program," he said. "It's an informational worksheet that helps people log the number of steps they take each day and charts progress over five weeks."

The sheet pointed out that in order to maintain health, a person should take 10,000 steps per day; to lose weight, 12,000 to 15,000 steps are needed. During the first week, the pamphlet recommended measuring the normal number of steps taken to get a baseline. Each week after that, participants should try to "boost" the average number of steps by 20 percent, or about 1,000 steps. Although adding steps may seem daunting for some, according to the information provided, it often only takes 60 seconds to add as many as 100 steps. Suggestions for adding steps include:

- Do jumping jacks, jump rope or just walk around the house for the length of a TV commercial.
- Walk out and check for the mail if your mailbox isn't at your front door.
- Take out the trash, bundle up recyclables, and dust the tops of your kitchen cabinets, including the 'fridge.
- Pace - don't sit - while talking on the telephone.
- Hide the garage door remote; open it by hand.
- Go down every aisle in the grocery store, even if you don't have to.

Learn more

To find out more about walking for fitness, visit www.walkinginfo.org.