

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Fitness Fun For Families

For the Torres family, the path to better health started with baby steps.



Shown: The Torres family, Ana (left), Saul (center) and Andrea (right), all participated in Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset's Fun 'N Fit education program, which combines healthy eating with regular daily exercise, resulting in the family adopting an overall healthier lifestyle.

"It is not easy if you want to change lifelong habits from one day to the next, but little by little anyone can improve their health and quality of life," said Saul Torres, 46, of Middlesex.

Mr. Torres, his wife, Ana, 47, and daughter, Andrea, 13, found the tools they needed by participating in Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset's (RWJ Somerset) Fun 'N Fit Program.

Supported by a grant from the Sanofi Foundation for North America, the free 10-week program teaches families how to eat right and exercise to improve their health. Twenty one families participated in the first year of the program, which kicked off last fall.

FALL FUN 'N FIT SESSION

REGISTER NOW! IT'S FREE!

OPEN TO CHILDREN
8 TO 14 YEARS OLD AND
THEIR FAMILIES.

NEXT 10-WEEK PROGRAM STARTS:
OCTOBER 10 THROUGH
DECEMBER 19

MEETS ONCE PER WEEK
ON SATURDAYS

9:30 TO 11:30 A.M.

RWJ Somerset is dedicated to teaching healthy lifestyles to families to prevent chronic diseases in our communities.

The Fun 'N Fit program will equip children and families with the nutrition and exercise tools they can use to lead a long, healthy life.

To register, please call 908-685-2814

"We have seen many great successes in just one course of the 10-week program. Each participant that completed the program improved at least one health indicator, such as body mass index, blood pressure and cholesterol levels," said Serena Collado, Director of the Community Health Department at RWJ Somerset. "We hope that families adopt these choices long-term so that they continue to see and feel improvements in their health."

At the end of the inaugural Fun 'N Fit session, the average weight of the adult participants dropped from 199.4 pounds to 178 pounds. The average adult body mass index dropped from 31.21 to 28.49 and the average adult waist size shrunk from 40.49 inches to 35.36 inches.

All of the children who participated improved two health indicators, with one child improving five. For example, one boy reduced his waist circumference by four inches, lowered his cholesterol from 144 to 119 and improved his HDL from 46 to 51.

The Torres family was encouraged by Angela Rodriguez, MSN, RN, APNC, of Somerset Pediatric Group in Bridgewater; to register for Fun 'N Fit. The program motivated them to change their diet, and included tips for healthy eating like recommending smaller portion sizes, or baking food instead of frying it and drinking more water. Instead of watching TV after dinner, they now take walks together or play basketball in their driveway.

Mr. Torres says these changes helped him lose 15 pounds and lower his blood sugar level.

"Everything really comes down to a 'way of healthy living,'" he said. "You know how it goes... you are healthier; you feel better; you are happier and you make those around you happier."

Gary Benedict, exercise physiologist with the Medical Wellness Program at RWJ Somerset's Sports Physical Therapy and Performance Center in Bridgewater, leads the fitness component of the Fun 'N Fit program. He educates the families on the importance of exercise and helps give them ideas on ways to be more active as a family. Among the activities featured in the Fun 'N Fit program were Zumba classes, kickball, relay races, obstacle courses and a family hike.

"We encourage families to do things together – just get out and play and have fun," Mr. Benedict said.

Children should get 60 minutes of physical activity each day and adults should exercise about 150 minutes each week, he said.

"You don't need to be running a marathon," said Mr. Benedict. "Just add a little bit of activity each day, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking farther away from the door, and it will all start to add up to positive gains."

Tia Hagins, a registered dietitian and a community nutritionist at RWJ Somerset, provided the ideas for families to help them alter their eating habits like providing sample foods that make a healthy lunch, or pointing out acceptable low-fat snacks and teaching the right food choices for eating on the go.

Shown right: In addition to exercise and encouragement, nutrition is a large part of the Fun 'N Fit program. Tia Hagins, a registered dietitian and a community nutritionist at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset, helps families with ideas that help them alter their eating habits.



Participants were also given food journals to keep track of what they ate.

"Start with some simple changes, such as switching from whole to low-fat or skim milk, drinking water instead of soda and choosing whole grain bread over white bread," said Ms. Hagins. "Slowly add more fruits and vegetables to your diet so that they make up half of your plate and watch your portion sizes."

Mr. Torres says Fun 'N Fit taught him how to set reachable goals, such as getting rid of sugary foods gradually instead of all at once and committing to lose one pound a week instead of expecting to lose 10 pounds in one week.

"It is the little steps that actually help," said Mr. Torres. "The most important thing is to not give up."

Visit www.rwjuh.edu/events or call 1-888-MD-RWJUH.