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HOMES



Finally Fit

A local nonprofit aids Colorado communities in the battle against childhood obesity.

BY DEBORAH WALDEN OSSI

Many Denver residents pride themselves on living in a “healthy” state, but the rate of obesity continues to climb in Colorado, putting some of our youngest community members at risk. While the obesity epidemic affects taxpayers, employers and families throughout the country, one Colorado nonprofit is building a roadmap to a brighter, healthier future for our children.

LiveWell Colorado is a statewide nonprofit that’s been around for about five years and focuses on education and advocacy for obesity prevention. “It’s always been about promoting healthy eating and active living as a way to combat obesity,” says Lisa Walvoord, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy. “Now we’re shifting our focus from all Coloradoans to kids specifically.” LiveWell offers many programs to help Coloradoans maintain healthy lifestyles. This includes partnerships and support for schools and LiveWell Communities—programs that enhance Colorado communities’ abili-

ties to implement and sustain healthy, active lifestyles—in areas of the state with the highest risks for obesity. LiveWell Colorado also promotes policy changes for health and fitness at state and local levels.

RISING NUMBERS

Everyone has an opinion on how Americans can get leaner, but solving the obesity epidemic

friends and communities. LiveWell approaches the problem from multiple angles.

HEALTHIER EATING FOR FAMILIES

Due to busy lifestyles, stress and work obligations, parents often find it difficult to integrate healthy eating and physical activity into their family routines. Walvoord explains that working toward a healthy diet is easier than it seems.

Even when they are eating healthy, kids need to stay active, which can be a challenge for young people facing the constant temptation of electronic devices.

for children is a complex dilemma. One in four children in Colorado is obese. Since obesity affects so many facets of a child’s life (and puts him or her at an increased risk for disease), many Coloradoans want to know how they can be a part of the solution, and not the problem, for obese families,

“We really focus on steps,” she says. “You can use the USDA’s MyPlate. Be conscious over the course of the day by asking yourself if you have filled half of your plate with fruits and vegetables. Think about whole grains. Be conscious about how much sugar is in your diet. Eating an

apple, rather than applesauce filled with sugar, is a very simple kind of example.”

Altering a child's junk food consumption doesn't have to be a painful process, according to Walvoord. “We've oversized everything, so think about the serving size and about the frequency of treats,” she says. “Instead of a big cupcake, do a mini cupcake with less frosting. Make zucchini muffins with chocolate chips and call it a treat. The younger we start those habits, the easier it is, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try on older kids.”

Quantity and quality both play a role in healthy eating for families, so Walvoord offers some tips to prevent overeating. “Think about the serving size. Ask kids if they are full or if they chewed their food. Use a smaller plate. Seconds are okay, but get kids to think twice about whether or not they really want more. And we need to get away from cleaning our plates.”


GETTING MORE ACTIVE

Physical activity is an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to preventing obesity. Even when they are eating healthy, kids need to stay active, which can be a challenge for young people facing the constant temptation of electronic devices.

Speaking of screen time, Walvoord says, “We need to not let that dominate time. Look for opportunities to be more active. Most kids need 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. Find time in small places. If you can, park far away and walk farther with your kids. If you can, walk instead of driving. Figure out opportunities to walk with your kids to school. Or park and walk a few blocks.”

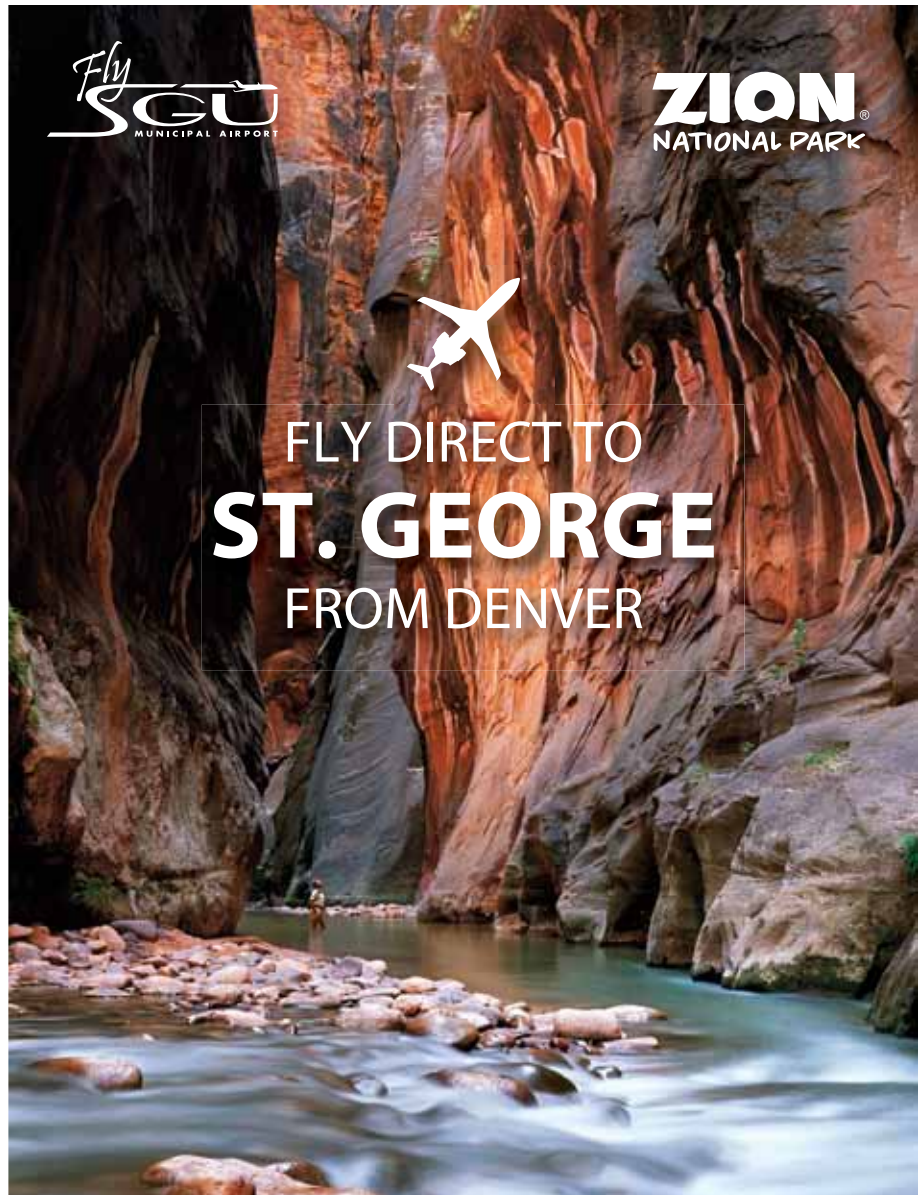
LEND A HELPING HAND

Fighting obesity goes beyond finding new options for friends and family. It requires a commitment to a better life for Colorado cities and communities. Tweaking dinner menus here and there might seem easy, but big community changes, such as implementing public parks, sidewalks and healthy school lunches, address the problem on another scale.

Walvoord has advice for Coloradans who want to promote healthy lifestyle changes in their families and beyond. “The solution is not any single action. It takes people thinking for themselves and their families, and making choices within their communities,” she says. “Have an active voice, become an advocate, look to LiveWell Colorado. We do advocacy work, so you can sign up to be an advocate. There are lots of resources for you and your family.” 



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