

Soda leads to obesity, study says

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — An extra soft drink a day gives a child a 60 percent greater chance of becoming obese, new research suggests.

The U.S. study, published this week in *The Lancet* medical journal, says the soft drink-obesity link is independent of the food children eat, how much television or videos they watch and the amount they exercise.

Experts, who called the findings "enormously important," have long believed that sweetened drinks were contributing to the rising obesity epidemic among children, but said there has been no reliable evidence of a link.

"These are estimates and the study doesn't tell us the importance of soft drinks relative to the other factors that contribute to obesity, but these data suggest that people aren't compensating" for the extra calories by cutting back on eating, said the study's lead investigator, Dr. David Ludwig, director of the obesity program at Boston Children's Hospital.

France Bellisle from France's Institute of Health and Medical Research, said the study provided "convincing" new evidence about the relationship between sugar and weight gain in children.

The prevalence of obesity among children in the United States increased by 100 percent between 1980 and 1994.

A common measurement of obesity is the body mass index, or BMI, which takes into account weight and height. A BMI of 25 means a person is overweight. The threshold for obesity is a BMI of 30.

For children, experts disagree on what constitutes obesity. Some believe that, in general, any child with a BMI above the 85th percentile for age and sex is obese, while others use the 95th percentile.

The study used the 85th percentile as the threshold for obesity. By that measure, scientists estimate that 24 percent of American children are obese.

The soft drink study involved tracking 548 children aged 11 or 12 from public schools across Massachusetts for two school years until May 1997.

It found that each sugared soft drink the children were consuming each day at the beginning of the study contributed 0.18 points to their BMI.

If they increased their daily soft drink intake, each extra soda made them 60 percent more likely to become obese, regardless of how many sodas they were drinking before. All the children were already drinking some soft drinks at the beginning of the study, but the researchers extrapolated that the effect would remain consistent even if a child went from drinking none to one a day.

Only 7 percent of the children did not change their soft drink intake over the two years. Fifty-seven percent increased their intake, with a quarter of them drinking two or more extra cans a day, the study said.

Soft drinks tracked in the study included regular sodas, Hawaiian Punch, lemonade, Kool-Aid, sweetened iced tea or other sugared fruit drinks. Pure fruit juice intake was also tracked, but that did not account for the effect, the study said.

"The odds of becoming obese increased significantly for each additional daily serving of sugar-sweetened drink," the study concluded.

An increase in diet soda consumption made the children less likely to become obese.

Budget increase approved for Nebraska Unions

BY CHARLIE KAUFFMAN

The rapid expansion of the Nebraska Unions' services has earned them more money in student fees.

The Committee for Fees Allocation approved an increase of \$76,877 in student fees funding for the unions Thursday, covering increases in student employee hourly wages, bathrooms for the new parking garage at 17th and R streets and Culture Center programming.

Nebraska Unions Director Daryl Swanson was pleased with several of the approved increases, particularly the increases in wages for students working at the information desk in the Nebraska Union and the maintenance of restrooms in the parking garage being built at 17th and R streets.

"There are no public restrooms, as of now, planned in that parking garage," Swanson said. "(The unions) are willing to take on the responsibility of cleaning and maintaining them."

Swanson said the restrooms will compliment a convenience store in the parking garage.

"I've got confirmation from parking (services) that if we maintain them, they will build them," Swanson said. The increased funding provided to maintain the restrooms was \$7,500.

Swanson said he was also pleased with CFA's \$10,000 increase in program funding for the Culture Center, which is scheduled to be replaced in about four years. Swanson said he doesn't want students to think the existing Culture Center will be allowed to wither and die while the new center is being planned.

"We're going to enhance programming in the current Culture Center during that period of planning," Swanson said.

Another approved increase provided \$3,000 to compensate for inflation and travel costs of the union's professional staff.

A proposed funding increase to compensate for a raise in the hourly wages for Student Involvement workers was denied.

Also incorporated into the budget was a \$1,500 decrease because of a decrease in Student Involvement's hours of operation.

The total student fees funding for Nebraska Unions next year is \$2,424,241.

Student Involvement Interim Director Diane Podolske said the denied funds will hurt the Nebraska East Union, which has a harder time keeping a full staff.

"I'm disappointed," Podolske said. "I think students on East Campus deserve the same services they offer at City Campus."

Podolske said overall she was pleased with the increases.

"I'm happy with the rest of the recommendations they made," Podolske said. "It was a fair review of our budget."

Another issue brought up at the meeting was the proposed increase in the state minimum wage. A bill is in the Legislature to raise the wage to \$6.15 per hour.

If the bill is passed after next year's budget has been approved, the budget might have to be restructured to compensate for the wages of student employees.

Research candidate shows enthusiasm

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institution. "Good science," he said, is something that should be determined by the faculty members, not by him.

Art Zygielbaum, director of research and development at Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, said he thought Schuster's presentation was "very delightful."

"I like that he's going to listen to the faculty," he said.

But Zygielbaum said Schuster didn't mention enough specific goals for the university.

"He could have mentioned more, but I liked his energy," he said.

Schuster is the third and final candidate to visit UNL in hopes of becoming the next vice chancellor for research.

UNL seeks a replacement for Marsha Torr, who left in August to become vice president of research at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond.

Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Donald Helmuth is serving as interim vice chancellor.

Elections altered by bills

BY GWEN TIETGEN

Legislature

The way Nebraskans vote and the final destination of the state's electoral votes could both change if two bills make it through the Legislature.

LB454, heard by members of the Government, Military and Veteran's Affairs committee Thursday, would give all of Nebraska's five electoral votes to the winner of the state's popular vote.

LB237, heard by the committee Wednesday, would change the date of the presidential primary election to the first Tuesday in April.

Nebraska would join the 48 other states that use a "winner-take-all" electoral voting system under LB454.

The current Nebraska system divides Nebraska's five electoral votes, giving three to the winner of each congressional

district and two to the winner of the state's popular vote.

Nebraska changed from the winner-take-all system in 1991. Maine is the only other state that divides its votes.

"LB454 gives Nebraskans a bigger bang for their buck," said Sen. Jon Bruning of Sarpy County, who introduced the bill.

"(As) a small state, this is the way we need to proceed."

Ken Haar, executive director for the Nebraska Democratic Party, said he couldn't believe this bill would be introduced after such a close presidential election.

"Nebraska is a national leader in using a more democratic alternative (for casting electoral votes)," Haar said.

Legislative notebook

Digital driver's license bill advances

Legislators are one step closer to giving Nebraska's driver's licenses a new look.

A bill aimed to make the state's driver's licenses more secure advanced to the second round of debate Thursday.

LB574, introduced by the Transportation and Telecommunications committee, was passed 31-0 to select file.

The new driver's licenses would include digital images and signatures and would be implemented by 2004.

Senators pass amendment removing English language requirement for private schools

Nebraska's voters will have the chance to decide whether private school educators should be required to teach in English.

Sen. Elaine Stuhr of Bradshaw introduced the amendment, which doesn't remove English as the state's official language.

Rather, it removes the English language requirement for private schools but not public schools.

The amendment will be on the ballot in 2002. Senators approved the amendment 45-1.

Compiled by Jill Zeman

Senators vote down bill aimed at curbing obesity

BY GWEN TIETGEN

Legislature

Fast food and television combined with an unbalanced diet and no exercise has caught up with Nebraskans and the rest of America.

Obesity, being overweight and the diseases associated with it are estimated to be the second leading cause of death for Americans.

And the national cost of anti-obesity drugs to help Americans with their weight problems exceeds \$50 billion per year.

Obesity is measured by calculating body mass index, which figures in a person's height and weight to gauge total body fat. A BMI of 25 or greater is considered obese.

A bill killed Thursday by the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee would have

added anti-obesity drugs to the Nebraska Medicaid program for anyone 19 years old and older.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Jim Jensen of Omaha, would have permitted the Department of Health and Human Services to establish, promote and maintain obesity awareness and education.

The estimated total cost for two anti-obesity drugs, Xenical and Meridia, is \$116,504 for the first fiscal year.

Dr. Tom Dolan, executive vice president of the Nebraska Pharmacists Association, said placing the anti-obesity prescription drugs on the list of Medicaid benefits would have been a positive step toward

decreasing the premature death and morbidity associated with obesity.

But Mary Luebbert, a dietitian and licensed medical nutrition therapist from the Women's Clinic of Lincoln, disagreed.

Luebbert said providing for the drugs without medical nutrition therapy was a waste of Medicaid funds.

The results of using the obesity drugs without behavioral therapy cannot be guaranteed, she said.

Dr. Richard Raymond, chief medical officer for the Health and Human Services system, said he saw the obesity drugs as America's answer to an easy way out.

"Without lifestyle changes, these pills that fight obesity have been proven in many studies to fail miserably," Raymond said.

Academic priorities scrutinized

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Priority programs were identified as those that had the potential to gain national recognition for UNL and those that needed strengthening.

Priorities were broken up into four categories: graduate/professional education and research/creative activity; life sciences; health and natural resources and undergraduate education and outreach.

Steven Reichenbach, associate professor of computer science and engineering, said he didn't think physical science and engineering were well-represented in the list.

"The knowledge generated by the university is an engine for the economic future of Nebraska," he said. "I think, in some sense, that mission wasn't adequately reflected."

Interim Chancellor Harvey Perlman said the priorities were identified by the colleges, not him.

Perlman cautioned the faculty members from comparing which colleges' programs were prioritized and which colleges' programs weren't represented in the list.

Several faculty members said the list was too broad and that it would be difficult for the university to find money for all the programs.

Perlman said the priorities will be ranked to determine where money will go.

"For a university like this, I don't think 102 is too large a number," Perlman said. "If anything, it could be too small."

The lists were generated from the individual colleges — through the input of department chairmen and chairwomen, deans and faculty members, said David Brinkerhoff, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Brinkerhoff said he didn't want the prioritization process to fall into the hands of upper-level administrators.

"We want to push down the decision-making process (to faculty members)," Brinkerhoff said.

Despite this, James Partridge, associate professor of plant pathology, said faculty members in his department felt disenfranchised with the prioritization process.

"It makes no difference what faculty input is," Partridge said.

"Decisions are made without us."

Of about 30 people who attended the forum, Partridge said fewer than half weren't administrators.

But Roger Johnson, animal science professor, said members of his department were asked several times for their input.

"I felt comfortable," Johnson said. "We began dialogues early on."

Perlman reassured faculty members that the list of priorities wasn't set in stone.

If a faculty member believes his or her program should be included, it's not too late for it to be added, he said.

"Pressure is on the programs that are on the list, not the ones that are off the list," Perlman said.

By the end of next week, a report will be drafted with the priorities to be sent on for review to the Academic Planning Committee next month, Brinkerhoff said.

The committee will forward its recommendations on May 1 to Perlman, who will then send it on to the NU Board of Regents and NU President Dennis Smith for approval.

City prepared for 911 outage

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the city and county quickly solved the problem. Police officers were stationed throughout the city so people could flag them down during an emergency, he said.

Doug Ahlberg, emergency management coordinator, said members of the Lincoln Amateur Radio Club were also stationed at about 40 different intersections so they could radio emergencies to dispatch as well.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Police Department and the Nebraska State Patrol also fielded some calls, which they radioed to the Lincoln Police Department, Casady said.

"We need to take a good long look at how we can prevent a failure like this," Casady said.

At a press conference Thursday morning, Mayor Don Wesely started the ball rolling on a preventative measure when he signed an executive order for a new 911 backup center to be built.

The center would be located in the basement of the Highlands Fire Station, 5435 NW First St., and would be an obvious answer if another outage occurred, Wesely said.

For now, Casady said it was a prime example of a sticky situation the city can only learn from.



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