

# IMPACT

Family and Consumer Sciences

## Fit Extension Working to Promote Healthy Habits

### *Strengthening Families, Communities, and the Economy*

Combined, physical inactivity and unhealthy eating are second only to tobacco use as the primary cause of death in the United States. Conversely, regular physical activity and healthy eating habits improve quality of life, prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer, and reduce health care costs for both the individual and society.

Nearly 75 percent of adults in Virginia do not meet the current public health recommendations for physical activity, and more than 70 percent of adults are not meeting the current dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables.

Fit Extension was developed between 2008 and 2009 as a collaboration between the Translational Obesity Research Program and the Family and Consumer Sciences area of Virginia Cooperative Extension. The program was developed to promote fruit and vegetable consumption and regular physical activity using an 8-week program that leveraged local social networks, included weekly educational newsletters, and weekly reporting and

feedback on progress. In 2009-2012, approximately 19 counties delivered the program and 1,200 participants took part each year.

During 2012, more than 600 adults participated in Fit Extension. Before the program began, 38 percent of the participants were not eating the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables. By the end of the program, respectively, that percentage increased to 61 percent. Also, approximately 28 percent of the participants were not engaging in any physical activity before the program, 42 percent were doing some activity but not meeting the recommended guidelines, and 30 percent were meeting the guidelines. Upon completion of Fit Extension these numbers shifted significantly to 15 percent (inactive), 41 percent (some activity), and 44 percent (meeting guidelines). Based on the shift in participants from not meeting recommendations for physical activity to those who are meeting recommendations, the health care and job productivity cost savings could be as high as \$1,350,000.



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