

## Nutrition and Physical Activity Prevents Diseases in Latinos



By Disly Juarez  
Graduate Student  
SDSU's School of Public Health

This month we celebrate National Nutrition Month. This is a perfect time to think about our own diet and make nutritional and physical activity changes to improve our health. Many of you might think that you are in optimal health because nothing seems to hurt, right? However, according to a survey by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke ranked in the top 5 leading causes of death in the Latino population. So you might ask, "Why do I have a high risk for these diseases and what can I do to prevent them?"

The fact that many Latinos are not eating healthy foods helps explain why many of them are at high risk for health problems. For example, when Latinos acculturate to mainstream society, their consumption of many healthy foods decreases and begin to eat more "American" food, for example, McDonalds, Chinese fast food, and other foods high in fat and lack nutrients. Furthermore,

eating foods high in fat are very damaging to your health. So what can you do to improve your nutrition? Here are some quick tips:

### Quick Tips to Improve your Nutrition:

- Order healthy choices when you eat out. Select foods such as baked fish or chicken instead of fried foods.
- Drink a full glass of water before a meal and another one with it. You'll stay hydrated and be less likely to overeat.
- Control your portion sizes.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables. For adults, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables each day.

When shopping, try to choose mostly whole grains. For something to truly be whole grain, it must contain the word "whole" as the first ingredient. (<http://www.latinonutrition.org>)

Regular physical activity is also important for preventing chronic diseases (e.g., coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer) ([www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)). Historically, Latinos tend to have one of the lowest rates of leisure physical activity among racial/ethnic groups in the United States, despite an increase in their level of leisure-time physical activity during the past decade ([www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)). This lack of exercise is becoming a great concern that

is affecting the health of our community, so here is some advice about how you can easily become more active.

### Quick Tips to Becoming More Physically Active:

- Engage in a total of at least 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity. You can break up the amount you do at one time, as long as you have bouts of ten minutes at a time. For example, 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes in the afternoon, and 10 minutes in the evening.

Incorporate exercise into your daily activities. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, park far away from your destination, or doing errands by bicycle instead of by car.

Participate in activities you enjoy with your friends and family members, so you have support. Is there a sport or active hobby you enjoyed in the past, like dancing or gardening? In conclusion, small changes in your nutrition and physical activity can improve your health and make you feel better. This month, begin practicing some of these quick tips, change the statistics, and enjoy a healthier life free of disease!

This message is brought to you by SDPRC/Familias Sanas y Activas.

For more info on our free physical activity programs in South Bay, please contact Sara Solaimani at 619-594-2965.

## Winning Our Fight against Obesity

By Vince Vasquez

San Diego may be known for its active lifestyles and recreation-friendly environment, but a new survey reveals that our local Latino community may be confronting a looming public health epidemic. New steps taken today can bring our families closer to a healthier, brighter future.

According to data collected from a Competitive Edge Research & Communication (CERC) survey in January 2009, nearly 6 out of 10 Latino adults in the City of San Diego are estimated to be above their optimal weight, ranging from "overweight" to "extremely obese" on the Body Mass Index scale (BMI). In the survey, Hispanic respondents were also the most likely of all ethnic groups to acknowledge currently having an eating disorder (13%), as well as know another person with an eating disorder (54%). These numbers aren't likely to surprise many public health experts; according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control, more than 73% of Mexican-American adults nationwide were overweight from 2001-2004, an increase of nearly 20% from the late 1970's. However, the root causes of this phenomenon are still a mystery.

Some experts have theorized that there may be a genetic predisposition to obesity among Latinos, whose bodies adapted thousands of years ago to fluctuating food supplies in arid and tropical climates. In agricultural societies, those who could quickly turn food into nourishing fat had a survival edge in lean years when crops failed. However, with the rapid urbanization of Latinos among all socio-economic classes, growing food security and diversity, and the rise of television and sedentary behavior, our genetic enhancements now leave us exposed to new health risks such as type II diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Those most in jeopardy are Hispanic youth; the lifetime risk of Americans born in 2002 to develop diabetes is 1 in 3, but for Latinos the chances are 1 in 2.

In San Diego County, childhood obesity is an alarming growing trend – according to state documents, the percentage of overweight 9<sup>th</sup> graders in our region nearly doubled from 1998-99 to 2004-05. San Diego Latinos understand the importance of this issue. According to the CERC survey, Hispanic adults view childhood obesity as a "very serious" or "extremely serious" problem (86% combined), higher than the citywide average. If we are to expect our children to make better choices than us, we must set a clear example of personal responsibility today. One place where parents can begin to address the problem is with confronting unhealthy eating habits in many of our Latino families.

"Binge eating" is a serious health condition where overeating becomes compulsive, creating feelings of powerlessness and shame in those who cannot stop consuming food. In

CERC's survey, 57% of Latinos were either unsure of what the term was, or had never heard of it, compared to 26% of Whites, and 36% citywide. Once explained what the eating disorder is, 38% of Latino adults reported having eating binges at least once a month, a rate that's nearly double the citywide average (20%). Showing more self-control and discouraging the acceptance of after-dinner eating can help children understand the importance of eating only when they're hungry.

Latinos must also focus on building healthier everyday habits, such as purchasing more fruits and vegetables at the grocery store, or following a regular gym routine. It's difficult for anyone to stay committed to a disciplined food and exercise regimen, but staying fit and healthy can be fun and interesting, as families can take the opportunity to try new ingredients, recipes and recreational activities together. Community leaders can also play an important role in encouraging healthier lifestyles in Latino San Diego. In 2008, Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett launched an anti-obesity initiative challenging his constituents to lose a cumulative one million pounds in 2008, encouraging residents to sign up through a website where they can track their weight loss, calculate their Body Mass Index, and learn about healthy food recipes and nearby fitness centers. One year later, nearly 26,000 residents have signed up online, losing over 306,000 pounds in that time. Mayor Sanders and the City Council should challenge residents today to join them in making a stronger community for all to enjoy by losing weight and staying fit.

Obesity and diabetes may be ongoing threats to Hispanic health, but they can be overcome with determination and an open mind. Fatty and carbohydrate-rich foods should not be allowed to define our proud culinary traditions, and family recipes can be gently modified and substituted with healthier ingredients. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latinos can continue to preserve their heritage while also ensuring that they are alive to pass it down to the next generation. To capture the competitive spirit and imagination of a widening population, local leaders should consider the merits of transforming America's Finest City into America's Fittest City.

Vince Vasquez is the senior policy analyst at the San Diego Institute for Policy Research.



Vince Vasquez

## Doula "Birth Assistant" Trainings Scheduled

Project Concern International's (PCI) California Border Healthy Start (CBHS) project is providing trainings to community women to become Doulas or birth assistants. The trainings are scheduled for March 27 and 28 or June 5 and 6. These will be held at the County of San Diego Assessor's Office in Chula Vista. The training is free and takes two full days.

The Doula training is offered to women in the target community who wish to be a part of the volunteer Doula program. Volunteer doulas will serve as birth assistants to the program's pregnant women within our 11 target zip codes. The volunteer Doulas are provided a small stipend to assist at births.

This Doula training provides participants with a basic understanding of the anatomy/physiology of labor and birth, the psychology of labor, and the use of comfort measures and techniques for labor assistance during labor and birth. The training familiarizes participants with the hospital culture.

The Doula model is included in the project's service to clients' prenatal, labor, and postpartum processes. Doulas are prepared to provide assistance during childbirth and are

trained to give continuous, non-medical physical and emotional support to women and their partners during labor and birth. A Doula's expertise is in offering comfort and reassurance. A Doula helps the birthing mother feel safe and confident throughout labor, delivery, and the immediate postpartum period.

A Doula's presence at birth, according to clinical studies, tends to result in shorter labors with fewer complications; reduces negative feelings about one's childbirth experience; reduces the need for the use of labor-inducing drugs, forceps/vacuum extraction and cesareans; and reduces the mother's request for pain medication and/or epidurals. Research also shows that parents who receive Doula support have greater success with breastfeeding and have less postpartum depression.

The project's Doula manager and trainer, Catharine Chichakian, a licensed clinical midwife, describes birth assisting as, "a joyful and treasured moment as a witness to a new life." Ms. Chichakian has attended over 1500 births in the course of her career. Her passion in life has been not only to assist women in having

healthier pregnancies, births, and infant outcomes, but also in training more midwives and Doulas to reach more women. Catharine has used many methods to better assist women to have smoother, less complicated births.

San Diego's CBHS program is improving the health of low-income pregnant women, mothers, and their babies in areas that represent the highest levels of poverty and poor birth outcomes in San Diego County by enhancing the capacity of the local maternal and child health social service systems and increasing effective outreach and recruitment into prenatal services early in pregnancy. As part of these efforts, trained Doulas "birth assistants" are available for those pregnant women who are enrolled in the program. A large segment of the population is Latina. The Hispanic population is a concern because the number of births is high and the population faces several risk factors and barriers to accessing perinatal care.

Those interested in receiving more information on becoming PCI Doulas or attending training can contact: Catharine Chichakian at 619-791-2610 ext.304 or cell-619-504-9219.

## Support group for families facing Alzheimer's disease

If Alzheimer's disease has touched your family's life and you need a support group for comradeship, understanding and ideas on how to deal with all of the daily changes, consider logging onto the following website <http://adrc.ucsd.edu/resources/support.htm>

"Our young caregivers support group meets monthly in the evening. This group provides an opportunity for adult children or young spouses to discuss issues pertaining to early-onset Alzheimer's or caring for a parent. The under age 60 focus allows for greater

identification and social bonding among the caregivers who may have felt less comfortable in a group of senior caregivers. Issues unique to young caregivers include juggling responsibilities of work, young families, and the demands of caregiving; legal and financial concerns including enforced early retirement, disability, etc., and the social isolation of a disease that primarily affects the elderly."

This above mentioned group meets in the Hillcrest area and those interested in attending can call (858) 622-5800 and ask for

Lisa or Frances To address the needs of Bilingual Hispanics; Frances Martinez-Good-rich, MSW (Social Worker) from UCSD and Dr. Jorge Porras (Assistant Clinical Professor at UCSD and Geriatric Psychiatrist) are considering the idea of co-facilitating a support group for younger Hispanic caregivers in the South Bay area. If you feel this type of group might be helpful and of interest to you, please contact Frances Martinez-Good-rich, MSW at the Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at (858) 622-5800.

**LACOLUMNA VERTEBRAL**  
El Soporte Informativo Para Millones de Hispanos  
Por Luisa Fernanda Montero



## La epilepsia también es asunto de hombres

De acuerdo con su naturaleza y con el papel que les ha dado la sociedad, los hombres son proveedores por excelencia.

Para ustedes, caballeros, el dar, el proteger y el cuidar a los suyos, es 'cosa de hombres', y la medida en que cumplen su misión, es directamente proporcional a su autoestima.

Así, la sociedad tiende a ignorar sus necesidades dándole prioridad a las mujeres y a los niños, en muchos aspectos, pero sus necesidades están ahí, son reales y usted necesita enfrentarlas; de ello depende en gran medida que pueda seguir siendo el hombre que es.

De su bienestar depende el de su familia, y si es cierto que condiciones como la epilepsia pueden ser difíciles de afrontar, también es cierto que a la hora de adaptarse adecuadamente a un tratamiento, los hombres son mucho más difíciles que las mujeres.

Muchos —si no todos— hemos escuchado a algún, muy masculino, pariente cercano renegar de nuestros amigos los médicos, llamándolos matasanos y rechazando neciamente la posibilidad de rebajarse a obedecer sus

instrucciones, en una cantaleta que no acaba hasta que la enfermedad y el dolor hacen su triunfal aparición.

La necesidad masculina ante la medicina es habitual, pero lo cierto es que cuando se trata de una condición como la epilepsia, hay que tomar precauciones, apegarse decididamente al tratamiento y seguir las instrucciones y los consejos de su médico o neurólogo, sin remilgos.

Y cuando hablamos de seguir instrucciones, nos referimos a seguirlas al pie de la letra, aun cuando sienta que los efectos secundarios son más molestos de lo que esperaba o que al disminuir los ataques ya no necesita continuar consumiendo los medicamentos, nunca es recomendable tomar decisiones al respecto sin el conocimiento de su médico; de hacerlo estaría cometiendo un gran error.

La forma en que la epilepsia afecte su vida depende de muchos factores, su edad, su estilo de vida y sus hábitos en general pero sobre todo, de la



Luisa Fernanda Montero

forma como usted decida asumirla.

La concurrencia de los ataques epilépticos puede interrumpir en cierta medida su vida cotidiana, eso es cierto, pero también es cierto que un tratamiento responsable, la medicina adecuada y el apoyo de su médico harán que estos disminuyan notoriamente o hasta desaparezcan en la gran mayoría de los casos.

Un ataque epiléptico es el resultado de una reacción eléctrica de su cerebro, como la diabetes se debe a un desequilibrio en los niveles de azúcar, no implica debilidad o inestabilidad. Con la ayuda de su doctor seguramente encontrará la mejor forma de tratarlos y continuar adelante con su vida.

Para obtener más información sobre como controlar su condición y tener calidad de vida, visite: [www.fundacionparalaepilepsia.org](http://www.fundacionparalaepilepsia.org) o llame al 1-866-748-8008.

La Prensa San Diego is on the Web  
<http://www.laprensa-sandiego.org>