



The University of Georgia Obesity Initiative

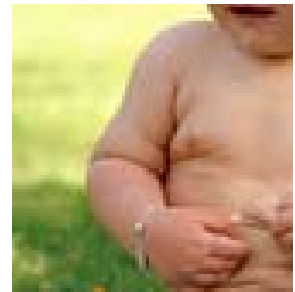
The Obesity Initiative at the University of Georgia, launched in June 2012, addresses adult and childhood obesity and its related diseases. Advances in research and efforts in outreach aim to improve the health of Georgia's citizens and decrease the cost of health care in the state.

Georgia: A State at Risk

Nationally, two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and teens are currently obese or overweight. However, **Georgia has one of the highest rates of obesity in the nation and is one of only seven states to have doubled its rate of obesity in the past 15 years.** One of every three adults in Georgia is obese, and another 37 percent of Georgia adults are overweight, bringing the combined level of overweight and obesity in adults above 65 percent. Furthermore, 40 percent of Georgia children are overweight or obese, and the steady increase in the number of overweight infants also is cause for alarm. Obese children have an 80 percent probability of being obese when they become adults.

Health and Economic Consequences

The related health consequences and costs associated with obesity are staggering. Obese adults are at increased risk of developing more than 20 major chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and stroke, diabetes, osteoarthritis, gall bladder disease and some cancers. Children are at increased risk for hypertension, diabetes, sleep apnea, asthma, as well as low self-esteem. Georgia ranks 12th among states with the highest rates of adult diabetes. **For Georgia, this translates to an estimated \$2.4 billion annually – the equivalent of \$250 per Georgian each year – in direct health care costs and lost productivity from disease, disability and death.** People who are obese have average annual medical expenses more than \$1,400 higher than those who aren't overweight.



Campus-wide Initiative Combines Research, Instruction and Outreach

The University of Georgia launched a major campus-wide Obesity Initiative in January 2012 to help the state address its growing epidemic of childhood and adult obesity, as well as the increasing incidence of overweight infants. Clifton A. Baile, a Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar, D.W. Brooks Distinguished Professor of Animal and Dairy Science and professor in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, along with the Offices of the Vice President for Research and Provost are leading the new UGA Obesity Initiative.

To develop this initiative, UGA will blend obesity-related instruction and research activities with its powerful public service and outreach components to develop obesity prevention and treatment programs that can be implemented by Georgia communities, employers and healthcare providers.

Research: More than 90 UGA faculty members are active in collaborative teams focused on areas ranging from basic research on obesity, metabolism, genetics and disease to the development of pharmaceuticals, weight management interventions, gaming and mobile technologies for health messaging and innovative after-school exercise programs.

Instruction: A novel instruction component is being developed at both the undergraduate and graduate levels that will include interdisciplinary certificate programs, areas of emphasis and continuing education. Courses are being planned in areas such as Service Learning for Obesity Interventions in Communities, Designing Environments for Prevention and Management of Obesity, Functional Fitness, Disability, Environment and Obesity, Training and Uses of Animals for Owner Obesity Therapies, and others.

Outreach: One of the key components of the Obesity Initiative is community engagement. As a land grant university, UGA develops community programs through its Cooperative Extension Service, the Archway Partnership, the 4-H Club, and other programs. Strong ties to Georgia communities allow implementation of translational research projects to demonstrate real-world effectiveness.



Collaborations are developing with Athens Regional Medical Center and St. Mary's Hospital to integrate obesity prevention and treatment strategies into healthcare. The initiative also will coordinate the study and development of state and national public health policies and economic strategies to address obesity and metabolic disorders. In addition, a Campus-Wide Obesity Prevention Program will be developed for UGA students, faculty, staff, and retirees. This program will serve as a template that can be modified and used in other organizational settings in Georgia and throughout the U.S.

Support

The Obesity Initiative, developed with financial support from the Office of the Vice President for Research and the Provost's office, will be strengthened through recruitment of faculty with nationally recognized expertise and by launching a \$10 million fundraising campaign for the obesity prevention work as part of its larger capital campaign. The Initiative is expected to also receive support from the Georgia Research Alliance.

The initiative will have a presence at the UGA's newly opened 56-acre Health Sciences Campus located near downtown Athens. When complete, the Health Sciences Campus will be home to the Georgia Health Sciences University/UGA Medical Partnership, the College of Public Health and other health-related programs.

Additional information: www.obesity.uga.edu

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