

Tackling a WEIGHTY Problem

MICHAEL MYERS

Tommy Hersee, an exercise instructor, leads a group through a routine during a MEND program for children who are above a healthy weight at the Carbon Valley Recreation Center in Frederick. The program — Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do-it — is for 7- to 13-year-olds. The Colorado Health Foundation and Kaiser Permanente in Colorado sponsor the program in five locations around the state, including the Ed and Ruth Lehman Longmont YMCA.

Overweight children schooled on good food choices, exercise

BY BETH POTTER
bpotter@bcbr.com

LONGMONT — Yvette Terifay's son Matt, 10, takes medication for Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism, which has made him gain weight, according to his mom.

So the family was excited to

attend a recent MEND program in Longmont — a free, 10-week long program in which families recommended by their children's doctors gather for activities about food choices and exercise, among other things.

The program — Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do-it — is for 7-to 13-year-

olds who are above a healthy weight. The Colorado Health Foundation and Kaiser Permanente in Colorado sponsor the program to the tune of about \$400,000 per year in five locations around the state.

The Terifays have always eaten natural and organic foods to avoid dyes, preservatives and other things

found in processed foods that could cause problems for Matt, Yvette Terifay said. After completing the MEND program, the family now also discusses portion control and does more daily exercise, she said.

Adults could benefit from some of the tips Yvette Terifay and Matt learned in the program. For example, Yvette Terifay now will tell her son to “wait 20 minutes” to see if he’s full after dinner, rather than going back to the kitchen immediately for second helpings, even if it is a second helping of vegetables.

“Everyone has habits. Maybe after dinner you always have dessert, and you just realize, for all of us, let’s just wait 20 minutes,” Yvette Terifay said of one of her new strategies. “Nine times out of 10, you don’t need it.”

Her child has better stamina as a result of games that helped the children get physical exercise in the program, but even better is his newfound confidence, Yvette Terifay said.

Matt lost three pounds during the program last spring. He has been exercising through the fall and also has grown a couple of inches, she said.

“He is slimming down, and he’s so proud of himself,” Yvette Terifay said.

The children are weighed at the beginning of the program and at the end. Their stamina is also measured with a stress test — how many steps a person can do up and down on a couple of inch high step in a minute.

Jumping on the trampoline for 20 minutes or a quick walk might be the exercise the family wants for the day. And baked potato chips rather than fried and a special kind of fruit roll-up that uses much more real dried fruit than major brands are some of the good food choices.

One in six kids is obese

Childhood obesity rates in Colorado are at 14 percent, or about one in every six kids, making it good sense for Kaiser Permanente Colorado to support a program like MEND, said Corina Lindley, a Kaiser spokeswoman in Denver.

“There are not enough of these potentially life-changing programs available or accessible to make a significant impact on the scale of

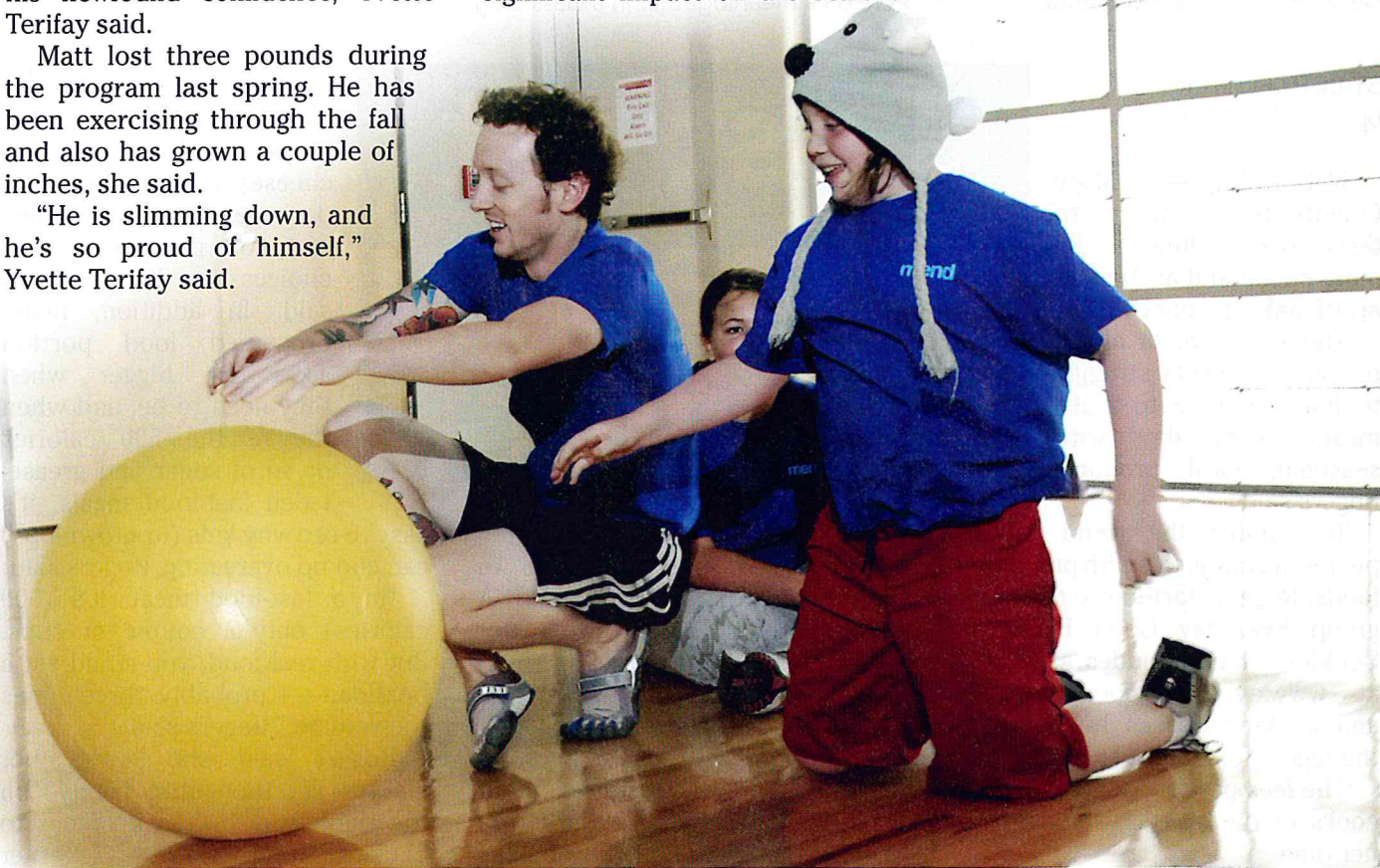
this epidemic,” Lindley said. MEND comes from the United Kingdom, but other childhood overweight programs also are available to families in the region, including the Food Friends and the Mighty Moves prevention program for preschoolers put on by Laura Bellows, a Colorado State University extension office employee in Boulder County.

With one out of three preschoolers either overweight or obese, it’s important to teach healthy habits to children at an early age, Bellows said.

Kids get a chance to try foods such as jicama, beets, tempeh, couscous, a Daikon radish, parsnips, buttermilk and Gouda cheese as one way to help them increase their willingness to try new foods, Bellows said.

“Most kids will try anything in a positive environment. Adults tend

— **Overweight** continued on 15



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Instructor Tommy Hersee shows K.B. Weber an exercise using a large ball during a MEND session at the Carbon Valley Recreation Center in Frederick.

Overweight from 13



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Nick Hochwender, a MEND program assistant, leads a discussion with parents about setting goals for their children who are above a healthy weight.

to put a little pressure on kids, 'take a bite,' or 'one more bite, please,' rather than allowing the child to determine how much food they're going to eat," Bellows said.

Bellows says kids have a tremendous ability to "self-regulate," in that they'll eat what's in front of them if they're hungry. Parents shouldn't be too quick to jump in and give their children a food they know they'll eat, just to quell a parenting instinct, Bellows said.

Children also learn age-appropriate physical activity patterns during the 18-week program to help them build their motor skills.

The kids love to find out about

their own super heroes who take journeys in the imaginary town of Healthadelphia, as they do various basic physical activities that help them with motor skills that help them balance, throwing balls and others, Bellows said.

Parents lament that their children are losing the capability to use their imaginations and engage in dramatic play, so the program explores those roles as well, Bellows said.

"We never use the words 'obesity' or 'overweight' with teachers or parents," Bellows said. "We want to establish healthy habits down the road that may help them."

Many adults in Boulder County tend to think of themselves as lean,

since Colorado has been ranked as the leanest state in the country in national polls. But children actually rank 23rd in the country in terms of body weight.

"Part of it is the lifestyle. We have really active families, but that doesn't mean the parents want to go on a bike ride with the kids," Bellows said.

In addition, the number of overweight kids can be higher in the Hispanic population, which values fatter babies as healthier babies, Bellows said. And most families don't seem to be as concerned about an overweight child until the child gets to school where he or she may be picked on.

OVERWEIGHT IN COLORADO

→ 7 percent of children ages 6-11 in the United States were considered obese during 1976-1980.

→ 17 percent of children ages 6-11 in the United States were considered obese during 2003-2006.

→ 14 percent of children ages 10-17 years old in Colorado were considered obese in 2007.

→ Hispanic children in Colorado were three times more likely to be obese than Caucasian children.

→ Colorado ranked 23 out of 50 states for its 14 percent level of obesity in children in 2007.

→ Oregon was the healthiest state in the country with 9.6 percent obesity in children ages 10-17.

Source: National Survey of Children's Health, compiled by the Colorado Health Foundation