Extension News You Can Use
Small Starts Can Lead to a Healthier Tennessee

Tennessee is one of the best places in America to live and work. But, it is one of only six states, and the only southern state, where the obesity rate increased in the last year. Our rates of hypertension and stroke, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, COPD and asthma, and several types of cancer are among the highest in the nation. The problem is worse than many realize, but there is a solution.

The University of Tennessee Extension is partnering with the Governor’s Foundation for Health and Wellness to enable and encourage Tennesseans to lead healthier lives through the implementation of Small Starts programs in all 95 counties across the state.

“Tennessee has the ability to improve our individual health and the overall health of our state, and we can start now,” Gov. Bill Haslam said. “We have high rates of behavior-related diseases, and by focusing on changing unhealthy behaviors we can improve our quality of life and also reduce the cost of health care and the cost of doing business in Tennessee.”

The Governor’s Foundation is a non-profit corporation established by Gov. Haslam to help Tennesseans improve their health by being more physically active, eating nutritious food in the right portions, and abstaining from tobacco. The Foundation has developed a suite of Small Starts tools designed for use by individuals, workplaces, and faith communities.

Small Starts @ Work provides employers with tips, ideas and actions to help employees get healthier together. It is simple to use and can be adapted for businesses and organizations of all sizes.

“A healthy workplace is good for employees, for business, and for Tennessee” Governor’s Foundation for Health and Wellness CEO Rick Johnson said. “Implementing an effective workplace wellness program doesn’t have to be costly, and it can significantly improve employee health, satisfaction, and productivity, and reduce absenteeism. Everyone benefits.”

Employers that are actively encouraging and enabling employees to live a healthy lifestyle both at work and at home can apply to be recognized as a Healthier Tennessee Workplace at any time throughout the year.

Small Starts @ Worship provides faith leaders with actions they can take to build a culture of wellness in their congregation. It is also simple to use and easily adaptable based on congregation size. Congregations that have implemented a wellness program can apply to be recognized as a Healthier Tennessee Place of Worship.
The designations are granted for one full year with an opportunity to renew on an annual basis. Those interested in becoming a Healthier Tennessee Workplace or a Healthier Tennessee Place of Worship should visit http://healthiertn.com and use the applicable Small Starts tool to register and apply.

Assistance with implementation of the online tools and recognition is available from your local UT Extension agent.

“Through this partnership, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agents will have a unique opportunity to use the Small Starts toolkits to empower worksites and faith based organizations to support healthy choices at work and worship in easy, doable ways for lifelong impacts,” UT Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Assistant Dean and Professor Dr. Laura Stephenson said.

UT Extension provides a gateway to the University of Tennessee as the outreach unit of the Institute of Agriculture. With an office in every Tennessee county, UT Extension delivers educational programs and research-based information to citizens throughout the state. In cooperation with Tennessee State University, UT Extension works with farmers, families, youth and communities to improve lives by addressing problems and issues at the local, state and national levels. UT Extension and TSU Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

For more information on this or other family and consumer sciences related topics, contact Shelly Barnes, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent for UT Extension in Wilson County. Barnes can be reached at sbarnes@utk.edu or 615-444-9584.