

Let's get moving on improving our health

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"Getting easier to find a parking spot at the gym after work ... see ya next year, New Year's Resolution people!" my friend posted on his Facebook status last week.

Having worked in commercial fitness, I am acutely aware of this period when the first Monday after the New Year, people are practically parking on top of each other to get to an elliptical machine and, six weeks later, the new faces are few and far between.

This ebb and flow of gym-goers may seem amusing to those of us who call our fitness facilities the morning of a snowstorm to check on hours of operation, but this scenario also illustrates a fundamental flaw in how our society views health and lifestyle behaviors.

After decades of advances in food technology, prescription medications and surgical interventions, Americans have grown to expect instant gratification in ways that do not yield higher qualities of life, specifically in relationship to our and our children's well-being.

Let's talk current statistics for a moment. Almost two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, with some states such as Alabama and Tennessee having obesity rates of more than 30 percent for adults.

How does Virginia weigh in? According to the Centers for Disease Control, 25 percent of adults are considered obese, and therefore at greater risk for chronic conditions such as heart disease, cancer and Type II diabetes.

Kathleen Sebelius, secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services, reports that upward of 75 percent of health care costs in this country are related to such lifestyle diseases. In other words, three-fourths of national health care spending is being funneled into conditions largely attributed to or exacerbated by daily choices that add up over time.

Without involving the health care debate in this argument, the most basic reform that must occur now is a shift from a mentality of treatment to one of prevention. This is a reform on which we all must agree, because even neutrality means apathy, and look where an apathetic viewpoint has brought us thus far. We must be proactive and preventive starting now, before we are beyond the point of no return.

Tuesday, Michelle Obama launched the "Let's Move" campaign to end childhood obe-

sity. Although this effort is intended primarily for children and young adults, adults are in equal if not greater need of this message.

Leading a healthier life does not rely on popping pills, getting belly fat sucked out by a vacuum or buying low-fat Snackwell's cookies in bulk. Healthier living involves small but critical choices every day that can improve or impair our well-being: taking the stairs instead of the elevator, eating 100 percent whole grain instead of enriched bleached whole wheat flour, drinking water instead of diet soda, taking a walk with your kids after work instead of playing video games, and the list continues.

Let's move on a nationwide effort to be more healthy and full of life for our children and future generations.

Healthy lifestyle choices do not have physical manifestations after one day of healthy eating or five days of working out. These behaviors promote changes that are gradual and, therefore, more permanent when practiced every day over weeks, months and years.

The same is true of elements associated with heart disease like hypercholesterolemia, where plaque builds within the walls of your arteries as years of eating fatty foods and processed goods. What you eat and how you spend your time ultimately may save you from premature death or kill you tomorrow.

Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" initiative and "Heart Health" month promoted by the American Heart Association provide two reasons why you should move now. However, the motivation has to start with you. No personal trainer, diet pill, surgical intervention or doctor can make you a healthier or happier person.

You have to want to be a better parent, employee, spouse and human being and take responsibility for your actions. There is no quick fix for being a better you. It's not easy. It will take time, and you have to start today. Let's move.

