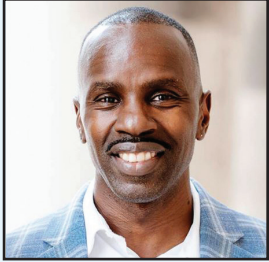


Take Charge Of Your Health Today. Be Informed. Be Involved.



CARLOS T. CARTER

Physical Activity

This month's feature highlights Dr. Bonny Rockette-Wagner's work on physical activity and its ability to mitigate a myriad of health problems. Dr. Rockette-Wagner also notes that incorporating physical activity into one's daily routine does not have to be complicated or time-consuming.

Recently we connected with Carlos T. Carter, the President & CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh (ULGP) to gain perspective on the importance of physical activity for the Black community.

How have you benefited from physical activity as you move through different stages of your life?

I've used physical activity to maintain good physical health as well as manage my mental health. From a young age until now, I've always tried to do some type of physical activity to stay in shape. I try and keep my body mobile by walking at least three times a week. I also do some light weightlifting and incorporate pushups into my routine. While I can't do the same things that I did in my twenties and thirties, I can continue to adjust based on what I can do at this stage of my life.

Staying healthy through physical activity and making healthy food choices makes me more confident as a person. I especially enjoy going on walks through my neighborhood as I get to connect with neighbors. Walking also helps to clear my head.

What suggestions do you have for our community on ways to add physical activity into already busy lives?

Keep it simple. It's nice to join a gym if you have the time and financial means available to do so. However, there are simple things that you can do to get moving. March in place, walk around your neighborhood, try to move as you talk on the phone, fill a jug with water and use it as a weight. Be creative with the time, space, and resources that you have.

How might we come together in our neighborhoods to encourage more physical activity in our lives?

One thing we can do is to encourage friends and neighbors to walk together. Leverage social media or simply call or text some folks to get together. Encourage people to take a class with you or start your own. If there are barriers to getting outside, try staying mobile inside your home.

I encourage our readers to make physical activity a priority to ensure a healthy mind and body. One thing that I really enjoy is dancing. Put on your favorite music and just move and groove! You'll break a sweat while increasing your joy!

Start where you are and move a little more!

Studies from Pitt's School of Public Health show that physical activity is the gift that keeps on giving

Imagine a day in the not-so-distant future when your doctor writes you a prescription. Only this prescription isn't for pills. It's for physical activity. The prescription includes the support you need to begin and continue a life-long health journey, which features better odds for living on your own and actively long into your elder years.

That scenario is what University of Pittsburgh's Dr. Bonny Rockette-Wagner, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, is hopeful will happen based, in part, on her ongoing research on physical activity, sedentary

ty, Black people suffer more from conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and strokes than white people.

The same is true for obesity. Black women experience the highest rates of obesity or being overweight compared to other groups in the U.S. (Office of Minority Health).

Although many people link exercise and weight loss, Dr. Rockette-Wagner thinks this mindset needs to be expanded. Physical activity needs to happen first for its own sake.

"The message is to start moving more," says Dr.



DR. BONNY ROCKETTE-WAGNER

how do you help someone move more who's never really exercised at any point,"

falls far down the to-do list for many of us."

That's why Dr. Rockette-Wagner's research is important. She studies how physical activity can help to prevent major diseases and how to get and keep us moving more and longer.

In her current study, Dr. Rockette-Wagner hopes to prove that tools like physical activity trackers, online education, health coaches, and support from PCPs and other healthcare providers—can have a lasting impact on how people get and stay physically active.

"We're currently studying how this type of interven-

adults who were at a high risk of developing diabetes. The trial demonstrated that diabetes could be prevented or delayed if participants lost weight and moved more.

With that in mind, Dr. Rockette-Wagner and Dr. Kriska showed that simply reducing the time participants spent sitting lowered their risk of developing diabetes. The same was true for inactive participants who became more active.

Ten years after the original study, these participants continued to be more physically active—sometimes twice as much.

Dr. Rockette-Wagner also worked on additional research with Dr. Kriska on a community-based version of the DPP.

It, too, resulted in similar findings. Participants who made lifestyle changes based on the DPP—including sitting less, moving more, and using fitness trackers—did much better than people who relied on health and nutrition advice alone.

As a result of all her research studying the impact that physical activity has on preventing health conditions, Dr. Rockette-Wagner's years of experience has produced some surprising data people can use right now.

"The big takeaway is that increasing your physical activity (with your provider's permission) can help you no matter how old you are, how much you weigh, or what type of shape you're in," she says.

"You can begin today, right where you are on your health journey. You don't need fancy shoes, equipment, or a gym membership. You don't need a big time commitment. You just need to move more than you did yesterday.

"Whether you move your body while you're sitting in a chair or standing, just move. Then do it again—or do a little more—tomorrow."

It seems, then, that physical activity is an investment for our golden years.

"It's truly one of the best gifts you can give yourself at any age," Dr. Rockette-Wagner adds.



ACTIVE FAMILY— Physical activity as a type of medicine that can help us live healthier, longer, more independent lives. (Getty Images)

behavior, and health.

"Our studies are showing that increasing your activity—especially if you're inactive—is so important when it comes to improving overall physical health, particularly as we age," she explains.

Based on her findings, Dr. Rockette-Wagner hopes people will think about physical activity as a type of medicine that can help us live healthier, longer, more independent lives.

Viewing exercise as medicine can be an empowering tool for the Black community.

Due to systemic racism and the resulting mistrust of the healthcare communi-

Rockette-Wagner. "If you can do that regularly, other health goals, such as how long and fast you move, nutrition, and weight loss, may be easier to reach.

For example, research shows that physical activity, such as a 30-minute walk each day at a moderate pace, can help to prevent or improve many health conditions.

The challenge for Dr. Rockette-Wagner and other researchers is to learn effective ways to help someone who's inactive and suffers from high blood pressure, for example, to become more active now and in the future.

"As a healthcare provider,

she asks. "How do you do it in a way that's supportive and affirming? How do you encourage that person to continue moving throughout their lifetime?"

Dr. Rockette-Wagner notes it's important to be aware of the difficulty many of us face when it comes to finding time to be more active.

"Even when we know exercise is good for us, we have a lot of things that compete with it," she says. "We have jobs, children, grandchildren, and elders who need care. We make commitments to our churches and neighborhood organizations we must meet. We have daily tasks at home. Exercise

tion can help at-risk people from developing cardiovascular disease," she says. "We must not only support the participants, but also make sure their healthcare providers are involved, too."

"When doctors have easy access to patient activity data, they can use it to create an individualized healthcare plan for that person," she adds.

During her doctoral work under Dr. Andrea Kriska, Dr. Rockette-Wagner examined data on sedentary behavior and physical activity from the landmark Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP).

The DPP was a large, nationwide clinical trial of

Adagio's Power Up program makes the healthy choice, the easy choice

In Allegheny and 15 surrounding counties, a no-cost program is helping families understand and make choices that could put them on the path to living longer, more active lives. It's the SNAP-Education program from Adagio Health called Power Up.

Power Up is part of the USDA's SNAP-Education Program. It's available at no charge to anyone who's eligible for SNAP or currently receiving SNAP benefits.

How does the program work? Educators at Power Up help SNAP clients of all ages make healthier food choices and live more active lifestyles.

For example, monthly nutrition lessons take place in a classroom setting for head start/preschool and school-age children, as well as community locations

with adults and seniors. The program delivers evidence-based education along with printed materials, nutrition education reinforcement items, and food tastings presented in a fun, engaging and memorable way.

Power Up also works with community partners, such as farmers' markets, food pantries, grocery or corner stores, healthcare sites, senior centers, WIC, the YMCA, and more.

To get entire families to use Power Up, educators also provide nutrition education via workshops, at community events, and share newsletters.

Learn more about Adagio Health's Power Up and how it can help you take control of your well-being. Visit the program's website at powerupeatright.com.

Start your journey to an active life with simple movements

If you haven't been physically active for a long time, but want to start, begin by doing simple movements that wake up your joints and muscles.

First, set a goal, such as completing 3, 5-minute segments of movements: One in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. Do this 3 times per week.

Once you reach this goal, work up to 3, 10-minute segments 3 times per week. Then increase that to 5 times per week and so on.

Here are some examples to try after you've talked it over with your healthcare provider:

Stand or sit in a chair and march in place for 2 minutes while you're watching TV.

Stand or walk around whenever you're talking on your phone.

If you can stand comfortably, hold on to your kitchen counter and raise your heels and stand on your toes. Repeat this movement for 1-2 minutes.

Use a soup can or a 1-pound bag

of dried beans as a hand weight and do 10 bicep curls on each side.

Do 5 or 10 stand-and-sit exercises. (Sit in a sturdy chair that won't move easily. Rise from the chair using your lower muscles, not your arms. Sit down again. This completes 1 rep.)

Stand or sit in a chair and raise your arms straight out in front of you as if you were stiffly holding a broomstick. Raise the "broomstick" over your head, then lower it. Repeat 5-10 times.

Put on your favorite song and sway or dance to the beat.

