



1515 Poydras Street, Suite 1200
New Orleans, LA 70112
Phone: 504/301-9800 Fax: 504/301-9801

For Immediate Release

Media Contacts:

Jason Melancon, Louisiana Public Health Institute
504.301.9841 or 504.319.1222 (cell)

jmelancon@lphi.org

Step Away From the Junk Food

Steps to a Healthier New Orleans Launches Health Promotion Campaign to Fight Obesity

March 8, 2006, New Orleans – Don't buy junk. Step away from that candy bar. Put down the potato chips. This simple, blunt anti-junk theme is at the heart of a new outreach campaign sponsored by Steps to a Healthier New Orleans, the city's health promotion and chronic disease prevention program, and the Louisiana Public Health Institute. During the next 12 months, New Orleanians will hear radio and television ads asking them to "Avoid Junk," a timely message for residents who find it difficult to eat healthy foods in post-Katrina New Orleans.

"Making small changes in the amount of junk food one eats can, over time, have a significant impact on obesity," says Carolyn Fernandez, Director of Step to a Healthier New Orleans. "Prior to Katrina, about one-third of adults in New Orleans are obese and another third are overweight. The "Avoid Junk" campaign is about rebuilding a healthier New Orleans," says Fernandez.

According to a 2005 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), obesity is now classified as the second greatest preventable cause of death in America (after smoking). Dr. Tom Farley, chair of community health sciences at Tulane and chair of the Steps to a Healthier New Orleans leadership committee, argues that snacking on junk food – munching through the workday or on the couch in front of the TV – is contributing to the obesity epidemic in the United States where 65 percent of Americans are overweight and 31 percent are classified as obese.

"People consume 5-20 percent more calories than they did 30 years ago and most of it comes from snack foods and beverages," says Farley. "The outreach campaign is very specific about what people can do to be healthier – reach for fresh fruits and vegetables instead of "junk" such as candy bars, soda and salty snacks. Small changes can make a big difference. This message is especially important during these difficult times considering the fact that obesity significantly increases the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and heart attacks."

In one hard-hitting radio ad, a woman leaving a supermarket is given a nine-pound bucket of lard, meant to symbolize the weight she will gain if she drinks one 12 oz. soda every day for a year. In another, a mother is confronted with 152 pounds of sugar – the approximate amount of sugar and other sweeteners the average American consumes in a year. Television ads take place in grocery

stores and focus on the health consequences of junk food. Each ad closes with a message from Dr. Kevin Stephens, Director of the New Orleans City Health Department, advising people to improve their heart health by avoiding junk.

A year ago, Steps launched the "Treat you right" campaign, which promoted increasing physical activity and eating fresh fruits and vegetables. The "Avoid Junk" ads will include the theme song for "Treat You Right" and will continue to use the supporting statement "Small changes change everything." "Evaluation of the previous campaign showed strong recall for the jingle," Fernandez says, "and an improvement in New Orleanians' attitudes towards healthy eating and exercise." The program will survey residents to assess the success of the "Avoid Junk" campaign throughout the year.

In addition to the new advertising campaign, Steps to a Healthier New Orleans is launching an outreach effort in trailer park sites in New Orleans, Baker and St. Tammany to encourage physical activity and provide educational materials related to junk food and nutrition. Free dance/exercise classes are scheduled to begin in April at the Ashe Cultural Center in New Orleans. Steps to a Healthier New Orleans is also currently seeking partners to establish several more locations for dance/exercise classes throughout the city. Individuals, churches and community organizations interested in creating dance classes in their community should contact Carol Fernandez for more information at (504) 301-9800 or via email, cfernandez@lphi.org.