

HEALTH & FITNESS

'Steps' on the way to boosting health

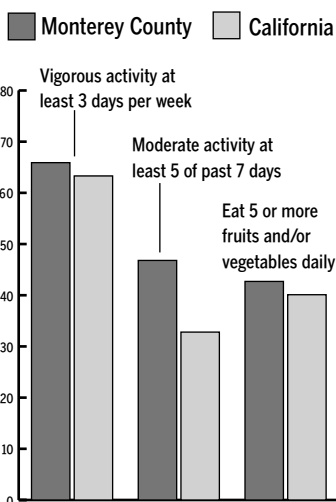
By DAVE NORDSTRAND | The Salinas Californian

Program seeks to improve habits

Seniors at LUPE/Firehouse Senior Center make new friends and become more active through a new walking group. ... Jaliscos and Olé taquerias and Mayra's catering truck add more healthy

Monterey County vs. California

Percentage of children and adolescents in Monterey County and statewide who answered "yes" to questions regarding exercise and healthy eating habits:



SOURCE: CALIFORNIA HEALTH INTERVIEW SURVEY 2001 AND 2003

options to their menus. ... Templo Rosa de Saron removes the soda vending machine from the church and Temple Beth El creates a walking group called, "Walk With the Rabbi."

These are just a few of dozens of new programs that are part of an important city-wide effort called Steps to a Healthier Salinas.

In 2003, Salinas was chosen to be one of 40 unique communities throughout the country included in the Steps to a Healthier US initiative. This five-year program, coordinated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is working to prevent chronic disease and promote wellness by targeting three major diseases — obesity, diabetes and asthma, and the related behaviors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition and tobacco use.

The federal government and the Steps to a Healthier Salinas program are focusing on these conditions because of their significance to public health. According to the results of the 2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveil-



For more information on the Steps to a Healthier Salinas program, call 755-4514 or visit www.stepstohealthiersalinas.org.

lance Survey, two-thirds of Salinas adults are overweight or obese. These rates raise concern because being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions, including coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes. According to the CDC, the lifetime risk of developing diabetes is one in three for all Americans, two in five for African Americans and Latinos, and one in two for Latinas. Asthma is the third-ranking cause of hospitalization among children under 15 and one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.

Steps to a Healthier Salinas, a project of the Monterey County Health Department and its numerous partners, is working with many community groups including faith-based orga-



Cecilia Alvarado shops for produce Jan. 20 at La Princesa Market in east Salinas.

nizations and senior centers, schools, businesses, clinics, the media, and its community advisory coalition, the Council for a Healthier Salinas, to help improve the health of the community, particularly for those with the highest rates of disease.

Changing the way the community lives and works is not a short-term project. For this reason, the Steps project places a heavy emphasis on supporting organizational and environmental change, working to put lasting and sustainable programs and policies in place that will change the habits of Salinas residents and encourage healthy life-

styles for decades to come. This could mean requiring healthy food options in schools, work places, and faith-based organizations, adopting criteria that promotes fresh local produce in food purchasing contracts, creating smoke-free entryways at privately owned buildings, requiring exercise breaks during long work meetings or retreats, implementing worksite wellness programs, constructing joint-use agreements for public access to school grounds and athletic facilities, building structured exercise activities into after-school programs, creating safe routes to school, "walk-

ing school buses" and neighborhood walking groups, or organizing better patient management through chronic disease registries.

This month, Steps to a Healthier Salinas is launching a new marketing campaign that will appear in newspapers, radio and TV and outdoor advertising, saturating the community with "Value it...it's the steps we take" or "Valórello...son los pasos que tomamos." This message refers to the steps that residents, businesses, faith-based organizations, health providers, and community groups can take together to make Salinas a healthier community. ♦