

HEALTHY LIVING

Ministering to body, soul

Church groups help members with weight loss

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Cox News Service

Dorothy Jordan participates in an aerobics class Thursdays at the community center at Clifton Springs United Methodist Church in Decatur, Georgia.

At a Bible study class in Roswell (Ga.), six women recite I Corinthians 6:19 — “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God.”

Then they set about the earthly task of shrinking that temple.

They swap low-fat recipes, share food diaries and chat about late-night cravings. They end the meeting by briskly walking around the church property.

They begin this weekly get together by stepping on a scale.

“We really stress how valuable you are, and you have to take care of yourself,” said the Roswell Presbyterian Church group leader Carmen Newsom, who is 37 and has lost 18 pounds during the 13-week program. “I know that if I am up at 10 p.m. and want a bowl of ice cream, I can call these women for support.”

Across Atlanta and the country, some places of worship are being enhanced with weight-loss programs — boot camps, walking groups and healthy cooking demonstrations.

Beulah Baptist Church in Decatur boasts

a 70,000-square-foot state-of-the-art fitness center complete with basketball courts, indoor lap pools, yoga classes and massage therapy.

And thousands of Atlanta area church members have recently joined the 50 Million Pound Challenge, a weight-loss program launched last year by Dr. Ian Smith, the diet expert for VHI’s “Celebrity Fit Club.”

The 50 Million Pound Challenge, sponsored by State Farm Insurance and targeting the African-American community, is a free online program that keeps track of weight loss and offers shopping lists, 30-day-meal plans and exercise regimens. Smith also talks about making dramatic lifestyle changes — including lightening up church potlucks.

Atlanta boasts more registrations than any other city, with 44,499. Although not all are church groups, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church alone has 1,700 of its members signed up, according to Smith.

Smith said churches’ space, numbers and infrastructure make them an ideal resource for helping people get in better shape.

He said teams of people typically lose 25



MARCUS YAM / COX NEWS SERVICE

Tiffany Whitfield teaches an aerobics class to members of Beulah Baptist Church and others in Decatur, Ga. More churches are promoting healthful lifestyles for members.

percent more weight than people who try to lose weight solo. And since church members typically sign up with a group, they are automatically more likely to shed more pounds than those trying to do it alone.

“Call it new age if you want to, but churches today are adapting nicely to what is happening instead of playing just the traditional role of spiritual guidance,” he said. “They are getting into the practicality of what someone needs to take care of their lives.”

Telleha Howard of Atlanta decided to join the 50 Million Pound Challenge several months ago after she was put on blood-pressure medication. She also signed up her church, Citadel of Hope, and 13 fellow church members got involved. The group has started doing cardio before its weekly liturgical dance class. Members also keep food journals and weigh themselves every week.

Howard has lost 53 pounds and went from a size 20 to a size 12. She has also lowered the dosage of her blood-pressure medication and expects to soon be off it.

Lamont Johnson, pastor of Shy Temple CME in Atlanta, admitted he was “the last

person” from his church to join the challenge.

But he said the emphasis on health in churches — stemming from a growing concern about obesity and related diseases, such as diabetes and high blood pressure — has stretched all the way to the church potlucks.

Johnson said he knew his congregation was serious about losing weight during a recent celebration. Tables were covered with one kind of dish — salads. There was spinach salad, chicken salad, fruit salad and arugula salad.

“When you are talking church dinners, you are expecting fried chicken and rolls and collard greens,” he said. “But you know what? This was really nice. A blessing actually.”

“People today are more health conscious,” said Johnson, who said he’s drinking more water and eating better but wants to do more to get healthier.

“And when you look at the church as a family, this is something you can do as a family. We have to do a good job of taking care of our bodies. That is scripture. We have to do a better job,” he said. ■



Dorothy Jordan participates in an aerobics class at Beulah Baptist Church's community center.

Edible silk may warn if food contaminated

To make sure you’re not eating contaminated spinach or tomatoes, you might someday want to sprinkle special silkworm silk on your salad.

Researchers at Tufts University in Massachusetts say they’ve discovered a way to make “edible optics” from the silk that can be used as sensors for E.coli, salmonella and other potentially deadly contaminants.

By manipulating the natural optical traits of silk, researchers could “program” the sensors to display a hologram warning or change color when they come into contact with unwanted bacteria, the researchers say.

“This is something that would be similar to the hologram on your Visa card,” said Tufts researcher Fiorenzo Omenetto.

Cheap, silk-based sensors that resemble transparent pieces of thin plastic

could be tossed into a bag of produce, or even used to make the produce bags themselves, researchers say. Films made from silkworm silk could be used to coat salad tongs in a restaurant, or even be shredded and sprinkled on top of your food.

Omenetto says that in his experience, it has almost no taste.

Tufts researchers recently published academic papers explaining their silkworm sensors and filed for patent applications.

They expect to begin producing prototypes within a year. If they’re successful, such sensors could possibly be on the market within the next several years. Sensors could be manufactured for as little as a few pennies each.

Scientists for years have been experimenting with different kinds of bacteria sensors for food. Researchers at Georgia

Tech in Atlanta, for instance, have created electronic biosensors that can identify bacteria in poultry plants, while scientists at Texas A&M University, Georgia Tech and other schools are experimenting with “electronic noses” and other types of semiconductor-based sensors designed for food safety.

What makes the Tufts sensors unique is that they’re natural, organic and completely edible. They’re also biodegradable and don’t require refrigeration.

“You don’t have to eat it, but if you do it’s okay,” he said. The same can’t be said about electronics-based sensors.

To make the sensors, Tufts researchers boil the cocoons of Bombyx silkworms, then extract sericin proteins —



TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Researchers at Tufts University have discovered how to use silkworm silk to make transparent “edible optical” devices that display a hologram or change colors when they come into contact with an unwanted substance such as E.coli or salmonella.

the glue-like substance that holds the cocoons together. The purified silk is then poured into molds and dried. ■