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URBANA, Ill. – Teenagers are spending more time in front of the computer and television these days and less time participating in physical activities. Those sedentary behaviors are a hot topic among healthcare professionals, educators and parents, as lack of activity and obesity are causes for a drastic increase in the incidence of Type 2 diabetes among teens.

Researchers at the University of Illinois are leveraging teens' interest in technology to teach them about the risk factors of diabetes. The project, called Healthy Outcomes for Teens (HOT), is helping teenagers understand that a family history of diabetes, obesity and inactivity make them vulnerable for developing Type 2 diabetes.

A teen council comprised of area high school students are serving as an advisory board to the researchers. The teens are providing valuable input about how they want to obtain diabetes information and what will engage them to learn more about the risk factors of the disease. The researchers are also gaining insight into the teens' eating habits and physical activity levels.



(Left to Right) David Goss, University of Illinois Research Assistant, Kati Smith, teen council member from Unity High School and Dr. Darla Castelli, University of Illinois Assistant

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So far the teen council has advised researchers to add fun to the computer games, consider a jingle to get the diabetes message across and use a variety of technological formats including MP3 players and the Internet.

The HOT project will kick off in after school computer laboratories and health classes in area schools in early March. The researchers will follow up with the teens in April 2008 to determine what modules of the project were most beneficial and what behaviors teens have changed as a result of the diabetes information and education they received through the HOT project.

Healthy Outcomes for Teens is sponsored by the Illinois Soybean Association, National Soybean Research Laboratory, University of Illinois Extension and the American Dietetic Association Foundation Food and Nutrition Endowment.

“If we want sustainable change among teens regarding their eating habits and physical activity levels, we really need to listen carefully to what teens are telling us and structure the HOT project so it is engaging, entertaining and educational,” said Dr. Karen Chapman – Novakofski, Professor, University of Illinois Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition.

“We’ve been meeting with our teen council and they have provided insightful perspectives that have enhanced the HOT project,” said Novakofski. “Their viewpoints are making our modules more appealing to teens.”

“Making teens aware of the risks of diabetes is the first step towards encouraging healthy eating habits and increased physical activity,” said Dr. Darla Castelli, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois Department of Kinesiology and Community Health. “Our hope is that teens who participate in the HOT project will gain knowledge and skills that will change their behavior and lifestyle now and in the future.”

Dr. Ellen Evans, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois Department of Kinesiology and Community Health and Jane Scherer, University of Illinois Extension Urban Programs Specialist are also involved in the HOT project which provides teens information and education about the risks of Type 2 diabetes.