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South Carolina ties for fifth on national obesity scale

From staff and wire reports

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South Carolinians' waistlines continue to expand, according to an obesity report released Monday. With almost 28 percent of adults considered obese in South Carolina, the state's ranking worsened to fifth nationwide.

South Carolina tied with Tennessee and Kentucky for fifth heaviest state. Its 27.8 percent of obese adults is a 1.6 percentage point increase from 2006, when the state tied with Indiana for eighth, according to a report by the Trust for America's Health, a research group that focuses on disease prevention.

Ranking heaviest in the nation for the third consecutive year was Mississippi, at 30.6 percent, followed by West Virginia, Alabama and Louisiana.

This year's report, for the first time, looked at obesity rates among children ages 10 to 17. The Palmetto State ranked seventh highest at 18.9 percent.

South Carolina's adult obesity numbers have worsened with each report by the Trust for America's Health. In 2004, the state ranked 13th with an obesity rate of 24.5 percent.

One in every four adults in South Carolina reports getting no physical activity, according to the report.

Jean Crow, associate director of Partners for Active Living in Spartanburg, said physical activity could be

incorporated in people's daily lives.

"The goal is to fight this problem facing our nation and Spartanburg by making (exercise) part of life," Crow said.

Crow said finding time to perform a regular exercise routine can be difficult, but taking the steps instead of the elevator can make a difference. A weekly drive to the library with the kids could be replaced with a walk or bicycle ride to the library.

Generally, anyone with a body mass index greater than 30 is considered obese. The index is a ratio that takes into account height and weight. The overweight range is 25 to 29.9. Normal is 18.5 to 24.9. People with a large amount of lean muscle mass, such as athletes, can show a large body mass index without having an unhealthy level of fat.

"It's scary not just for South Carolina's adults, but kids," said Curt McPhail, program officer with the Mary Black Foundation, which promotes active living and early childhood education in Spartanburg. "We've underestimated the value of getting kids active. We've short-changed them. We've gotta stop thinking physical education and active living or riding a bike is frivolous."

McPhail said organizations such as the Mary Black Foundation, Partners for Active Living, the Spartanburg Nutrition Council and Upstate Forever are good for Spartanburg.

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