

News Column for Use Week of 4/12/2021  
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River Valley District  
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### **A Healthy Community for our Community's Health**

As spring has sprung, many of my Extension Agent coworkers across the state are calling for us to get out and get active. Whether that be a brisk walk or to get out in our lawns and gardens, they are prompting us to pursue a healthier lifestyle for our health. However, I cannot help but think of what the impact would be if our communities were to pursue an overall higher level of health. Community health looks past our health and looks at how our cumulative health affects the overall community.

Community health influences everything from educational achievement, safety and crime, people's ability to work and be financially healthy, life expectancy, happiness, and more. Health impacts every other facet of our lives, from a child's ability to learn to an adult's ability to work, so health is important for education and financial well-being. The health of our community influences community growth and development.

Unhealthy communities lead to chronic diseases, such as cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. Chronic diseases like these not only reduce life expectancy, they have a dramatic effect on the economy. The CDC reports that 90 percent of the nation's annual healthcare expenses are for people with chronic and, for the most part, preventable health conditions.

A healthy community is one in which residents have access to a quality education, safe and healthy homes, adequate employment, transportation, physical activity, and nutrition, in addition to quality health care. The effect of health on quality of life can also affect our desire to participate in civic duties like voting, social functions, and leisure activities, according to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

It is not enough to have the availability of our health infrastructure. We need to utilize our doctors, hospitals, dentists, health departments, and many other healthcare professionals and facilities. We need to engage in a healthier lifestyle including appropriate nutrition and exercise. Sonia Cooper, our Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health Extension Agent, says that we make things harder than they need to be. A brisk walk twice a day can have a positive impact on our health. She states that the best exercise program for you is not necessarily one that causes you to lose the most weight or gain the most muscles, but the one you will actually do. We can start from where we are.

So, let me join the chorus, get out there and be healthy! You are not just helping yourselves, you are helping your entire community.

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