

A little exercise goes a long way

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- St. Louis Rams free safety and Mankato native Craig Dahl says exercise will be a part of his life long after his NFL career.



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Presentation explains that getting your groove on can prevent cancer, fight depression

By Dan Linehan The Free Press

NORTH MANKATO — St. Louis Rams free safety Craig Dahl began his physically active lifestyle on the streets of Mankato, competing with older neighborhood boys and a brother 14 months older than him.

Dahl thrived on competition that motivated him to participate in high school sports and eventually professional football.

But you don't need to exercise 150 minutes a day and lift weights for 45 minutes like Dahl does to get the health benefits of physical activity, health experts told a crowd of about 130 Tuesday at South Central College.

The presentation, "Exercise is my medicine," sought to make the benefits of exercise accessible to regular people.

Dr. Steve Penkhus, an obstetrics and gynecology specialist at the Mankato Clinic, said 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week (activity too intense to sing but not to talk) or half that amount of vigorous activity will suffice.

That's fewer than one-tenth the minutes the typical American spends watching TV every week (1,600).

He didn't say it should be easy.

"Our whole economy is structured around selling products to keep us unhealthy," he said.

Penkhus didn't spare his own profession's lack of incentives for prevention: "Doctors make more money if you're sick than when you're healthy."

It's well known that exercise will help your heart (which corresponds to a 40 percent reduction in heart disease) and prevent diabetes (a 50 percent reduction) but also fights Alzheimer's disease and depression, Penkhus said.

Exercise also reduces erectile dysfunction in men and improves sexual satisfaction in women, he said. There is strong evidence that it lowers the likelihood of colon and breast cancers, as well.

Chip Gay, an exercise physiologist at Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital, said overweight people get the benefits of exercise even if they don't lose weight.

"Weight and fitness have nothing to do with each other," he said.

Exercise makes the heart stronger, bones thicker and "is like unplugging fuel filters" to help get sugar to your muscles and prevent diabetes — none of which has anything to do with weight.

Nor are these health benefits solely the province of gym rats.

Gay said the word "fitness" can be intimidating because it evokes images of fitness nuts.

"You don't need to do that to gain the health benefits we're talking about," he said.

North Mankato women Adeline Riha and Dorothy Norland said the presentation helped reinforce what they already knew.

Norland said she was interested to hear of the benefits of exercise for people with existing conditions like diabetes.

She said she exercises three or four times a week at Anytime Fitness.

For Dahl's part, exercise will be a part of his life long after his NFL career and the motivation of the Sunday matchups ends.

"It's been such a big part of my life," he said.

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