



weight matters

THE OBESITY RESEARCH CENTER

DR. NAIMA MOUSSA-MOUSTAID CO-DIRECTS
THE NEW CENTER FOR OBESITY RESEARCH.



In a proactive response to the growing concerns over the problem of obesity, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, announced the formation of the Obesity Research Center on August 24, 2007. Two faculty members from the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences will serve as the center's co-directors. Dr. Naima Moustaid-Moussa is a professor of nutrition and animal science, and Dr. David Bassett is a professor of exercise, sport, and leisure studies.

"Obesity is a complex problem, and we hope to address it from many different angles. We will consider the many factors contributing to overweight and obesity, including calorie intake, calorie expenditure, psychological issues, genetics, and culture," said Bassett. Bassett earned his doctorate in physical education at the University of Wisconsin and has been at UT since 1988.

Moustaid-Moussa has devoted much of her professional career to studying issues surrounding obesity. "The ultimate outcome of the center's research will be to contribute to developing a new understanding of the mechanisms of obesity and to developing new dietary and physical activity strategies to combat the obesity epidemic and improve the quality of life," she said. Moustaid-Moussa earned her doctorate in endocrinology at the University of Paris IV and has been at UT since 1993.

The number of obese and overweight adults and children is a growing concern. Government programs to prevent and treat obesity have had limited effect. About one-third of U.S. adults are obese, which is one of the reasons for the nation's life expectancy rankings dropping below those of many other industrialized nations. A recent report ranked Tennessee as having the fifth highest obesity rate in the nation, with 27.8 percent of its population considered obese. "The UT Obesity Research Center will play a significant role in the prevention and treatment of obesity in the state of Tennessee and assist in informing research and treatment practices all over the United States," said Bob Rider, dean of the college.

The center's goal will be to provide a central place for faculty from many disciplines to collaborate on research efforts aimed at addressing the health concerns associated with obesity. Funding for the center will come from a variety of sources, including the UT Office of Research; UT Agricultural Experiment Station; UT Extension; and the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. In addition to bringing together teachers and researchers who are interested in studying obesity, the center hopes to find additional sources of funding for research that may lead to discoveries of ways to lower the rate of obesity in the nation.

Through a multidisciplinary research approach, center organizers hope to gain a better understanding of the health problems surrounding obesity and, ultimately, provide recommendations for addressing the growing obesity epidemic. More than 40 faculty members from various academic disciplines—including animal science, veterinary medicine, plant sciences, psychology, nursing, social work, and economics, as well as researchers from

the Oak Ridge National Laboratory—will work collaboratively on research at the center. The center will coordinate research on genetic and environmental factors causing obesity, develop plans for long-term prevention and treatment of obesity, and disseminate research findings to the general public. The center also is designed to serve as a research training facility for both undergraduate and graduate students studying obesity. Faculty will offer seminars on their research to members of the university and community. [a](#)



RESEARCHING THE BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS OF WEIGHT LOSS

Hollie Raynor, assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition, is a leading authority on behavioral aspects of weight loss. Her research interests combine her nutrition and psychology training through the investigation of eating regulation—specifically factors that affect satiation and behavioral interventions for obesity. She is interested in eating regulation in both adults and children and in examining factors that affect choices in eating behavior. Her specific areas of interest also include examining dietary variety, portion size, and the reinforcing value of food on food intake.

Raynor is a co-investigator for three National Institutes of Health-funded grants, two of which focus on long-term maintenance of behaviors important for weight loss and maintenance of weight loss in adults. The third grant examines changes that occur in the reinforcing value of high- and low-fat foods and how these changes are associated with weight loss during obesity treatment. She is also the primary investigator for two other funded studies—one funded by the NIH and the other by the American Diabetes Association, which examine family-based pediatric obesity treatment in young children (ages 4 to 9 years). These two projects are examining whether changing a few specific eating (i.e., sweetened drink intake) and leisure-time behaviors (i.e., TV watching) are enough to improve weight status in young children, which combination of these behaviors produces the best change in diet quality and amount of activity in the children, as well as which may be easier to maintain over time. Additionally, as increasing the structure of the diet appears to be a strategy that is helpful for successful weight loss maintenance, she is investigating what influence a dietary variety prescription has on long-term weight loss during an 18-month adult behavioral weight-loss intervention. This project has also been funded by NIH and will be enrolling interested and eligible participants at UT in the fall of 2008.