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Lower BMI for women

Women, particularly those aged 55 and older, should have a body mass index of less than 22 to reduce their risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease, according to a leading Australian women’s health expert.

Current Australian guidelines for a healthy BMI for women are between 18.5 and 24.9. “I know this audience is educated about health but how many of you have a BMI of less than 22?” Professor Helena Teede said at the 16th Australasian Menopause Society Congress held in Melbourne last month.

Obesity was a significant health problem with currently 60% of Australians overweight, the Monash University endocrinologist and expert in women’s health said.

Statistics show one in four Australians had diabetes or pre-diabetes, an 87% increase in the past 15 years. “By 2020 the Australian health care system will not be able to fund the diabetes burden. We need to be vigilant with diabetes,” Professor Teede said.

Young women were gaining a kilogram a year, she said, requiring early screening to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in later life. Women over 35 years should be assessed for diabetes and cardiovascular disease, including risk factors such as hypertension, smoking, diabetes, nephropathy and vascular disease, according to Professor Teede. “Cardiovascular disease is the primary cause of mortality. It is estimated that 80% is preventable.”

There were greater opportunities now for early recognition of risk factors for women, particularly with screening for gestational diabetes. Pregnant women were currently putting on an extra two to four kilograms than the recommended weight increase throughout pregnancy.

While women had visceral fat distribution changes at menopause which meant a lag time in risk at that age, they caught up with men in later life. “HRT does not stop preventing weight gain but it does reduce the visceral fat deposit,” Professor Teede said.

Professor Teede said it was about making “really small changes”. “It’s about having one biscuit at morning tea or half a glass of orange juice instead of a whole glass at breakfast. Once people are overweight it is difficult to lose, we know that about 97% of people who lose a lot of weight regain it.”

Obesity was as much of a public health concern today as smoking was 20 years ago, she said.

History of psychiatric nursing recorded

BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND RN NATISHA SANDS

On World Mental Health Day 10 October this year, the Centre for Psychiatric Nursing (CPN) launched a documentary entitled ‘Round the Bend: A History of Psychiatric Nursing in Victoria’, that was written, filmed and produced by Associate Professor Natisha Sands (Deakin University) and John Vokoun (Alfred Health).

The feature length documentary explores the development of psychiatric nursing from the early colonial beginnings in 1848 through to the post-institutional present. The film commences with a montage of photos, film and narrative which documents the period until the 1930s. The period from the 1930s to the present is described chronologically in oral histories provided by personal interviews with psychiatric nurses.

The interviews include a number of key psychiatric nurse leaders who were instrumental in bringing about significant changes to nursing practice and education, and were also at the forefront of leading major reforms to service delivery in Victoria such as the community mental health movement. The oral histories provide an account of the history of this unique area specialty of nursing.

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