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Kids race for fruits, veggies

Kai Beech/Tri-City Weekly
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Kids race for fruits, veggies

As California children continue to battle an obesity epidemic, several local groups are teaming up to help cure the outbreak of this life-threatening and very preventable disease.

On May 17, 30 afterschool students from Alice Burney, Lafayette, Grant and Trinidad elementary schools raced through various locations in Old Town Eureka during the first-ever "Amazing Fruit and Veggie Fest."

The race, modeled after the TV show, "The Amazing Race," was kicked off by local triathlete Mike Pigg. Students were given challenges that incorporated nutrition education, physical activity and water safety. The race finished at the Eureka Co-op where free sample recipes and cookbooks were passed out. In addition, the students had the opportunity to make smoothies with a bike-powered blender, received tips on how to add fruits and vegetables to meals and heard about ideas to improve overall health.

"We wanted to focus on nutrition, healthy eating and promoting physical activity in a fun way," said Linda Prescott, nutrition education coordinator for the Humboldt County Office of Education. "We're looking at child overweight rates and looking for ways to add foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, to their diets and be active on a regular basis."

The goal of events like the fruit and veggie fest is to help engage local families to become part of the solution. Fruit and veggie fest

activities show consumers on the North Coast, and across California, that even small steps, like adding more fruits and vegetables to meals and snacks, can lead to big health improvements.

"A healthy diet is critical for learning and overall health," Prescott said. "You can have the best teachers and most technology but if a child isn't well nourished it compromises their ability to learn in the classroom."

Prescott recommended a diet in which a person receives 55 to 60 percent of their calories from carbohydrates, 30 percent or less from fat and 15 to 20 percent from proteins. She also recommends eating five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day (Note: a typical serving size is often viewed as a baseball-sized piece of fruit or a half cup of vegetables).

Despite the statistics, Prescott urged people not to focus as much on calories as they do on a colorful plate.

"Kids and adults should be able to look at their plates and know there's a good size serving of fruits, vegetables

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and whole grains," she said.

In addition to food, Prescott added that many people should rethink their drinks.

"So many of the popular beverages marketed to kids today are sweetened with sugar," she said. "Popular drinks like Red Bull will cause the body to excrete more water and have 10 to 15 sugar cubes in a can. They are just empty calories and have no nutritional value. Make water your choice to quench your thirst."

Similar fruit and veggie fest celebrations are scheduled throughout California and the Humboldt County during the month of May.

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