

**Abstract Title:** A pilot program to determine the feasibility of organizing a walking/healthy lifestyle program for seniors in a rural community  
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**Purpose:** The objective of this pilot program was to determine the feasibility of offering patients of a Family Health Team the opportunity to participate in a free walking/healthy lifestyle program in a rural area.

**Summary of content:** Family Health Teams are encouraging patients to follow healthy lifestyles, including participating in physical activity, but patients are faced with barriers such as distance and cost of programs. In rural areas, these barriers become more pronounced.

Our program was designed to allow new participants to join at any time of the year. Ten to 12 participants attended class regularly. After the program, these participants reported having more energy, able to maintain weight and having favorable blood lab results. Participants also reported having looked into other fitness programs on other days. Reasons for continued attendance ranged from medical health problems necessitating continued lifestyle changes, to staying fit, and meeting friends. Participants noted that comradeship kept them interested in attending the program.

**Systematic approach used:** Our program was advertised in the clinic and local newspaper. Staff from the YMCA, Nurse Practitioner and Dietitian greeted participants Wednesdays during lunch hour on the walking track at the Clinton arena. The YMCA staff led the exercises at the many workout stations for the first 15 minutes. Participants then walked laps while music played. The program ended with the RD and NP presenting various nutrition and lifestyle information to further encourage healthy living while a healthy snack was served.

**Recommendations/Conclusions:** Creating a no cost to the participant fitness program, that includes a healthy living education component, is effective in reducing barriers to healthy lifestyle choices, in a rural area. While one day per week may not lead to substantial changes in one's health, it gives participants the initiative and direction to pursue more physical activity per week and attain healthy lifestyle goals.