## Nutrition Issue Facts

Serving size: 1 issue VUMC House Organ (3-2011 issue)

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<td>Food Advisory Committee Update</td>
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* Based on a 9-article issue. Other issues may have a different percentage based on issue content. A significant source of good photographs by talented staff. Tasty recipes, a listing of on-campus eateries, and other exclusive content is at www.vanderbilt.edu/houseorgan
D uke, the European Doberman who was photographed lounging in his driveway by Wendy Ashe of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, was the royalty of the 2011 House Organ Pet Poll, which was conducted in conjunction with the annual “Pets of Vanderbilt” issue.

Duke ran away from the pack with 551 votes, the most for any nominee in any category, representing 23.8 percent of the total. Second place came from the other end of the canine size range, Lee Ann Jarrett from the School of Nursing’s Chihuahua named Chihuahua. Third place went to Lauren Hayes of Development and Alumni Relations for her wonderfully expressive big dog Neely.

The Cat winner was Tahoe, the extremely relaxed-looking gray tabby lauguidly sprawled on the armchair of Elizabeth Campos Pearce of Otolaryngology. Tahoe used his slinky feline charms to come in first place with 225 votes, or 18.4 percent of those cast. Runner up was Pheebee, the photogenic kitty of Danica Partin of Allergy, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine. Third place went to Rocky, the pensive green-eyed companion of Suryakala Sarilla of Pathology.

In the Duo category, voters were taken with Porter and Millie, a little boy and little dog keeping an eye on each other, photographed by Janet L. Hardison of Cardithoracic Anesthesia. The boy and dog received 271 votes, or 20.9 percent of those cast in the category. Second place went to another boy-and-dog photo, 4-year-old Will with Maggie the boxer, taken by Jackie Kolb of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Third place in the Duo category broke the stranglehold that mammalian pets have had on the category.

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In September 2009, a new Medical Center committee, aptly called the Food Advisory Committee, was established at the request of the Medical Center’s senior leadership to evaluate nutritional (food) options available on campus.

The formation of this committee was in part response to a necessary evaluation process for which vendor would inhabit the space that formerly housed McDonald’s. But the Food Committee was also, and perhaps more importantly, established to take a comprehensive look at which on-campus food options are available for Medical Center faculty, staff, students and visitors, and how best to make long-term improvements to a variety of dining options in a manner that will yield positive consequences for everyone.

Members of the Food Advisory Committee, which includes students, physicians, staff and a representative from the Patient Family Advisory Committee, were selected to represent diverse segments and opinions from across the Medical Center. The committee’s responsibility is to evaluate and discuss nutritional options and then make evidence-based recommendations to Medical Center leadership about potential changes that could result in improvements which are in alignment with the institution’s mission for the advancement of health and wellness.

“The Food Advisory Committee continues with its assigned task of performing a thorough analysis of all facets of our on-campus nutritional offerings, such as cost, convenience, throughput and the capability of vendors to partner with the Medical Center on nutritional and wellness initiatives as well as impact to our visitors, students, faculty and staff,” said George DeLong, associate hospital director for Support Services and Supply Chain and chair of the Food Advisory Committee. “Through ongoing analysis, we continue to develop a blueprint that will offer more varied and healthy meal options throughout all of our on-campus eateries.”

Recommendations of the Food Committee have already resulted in changes. Healthy menu items are now highlighted in the Courtyard Café. A new selection of lower-priced items went into effect back in September. In addition, the Courtyard Café continues to bring a broader selection of healthy menu options and better awareness for customers of nutritional and caloric content.

Through its Wellness &You program, the Courtyard Café in the Vanderbilt Clinic now offers a daily, healthy meal option available to faculty and staff at a 25 percent reduced price. An example of the daily healthy lunch option, which typically includes a meat and two side dishes, is on display just inside the cafeteria’s main entrance Monday through Friday for lunch and dinner.

Customers are able to see the portion size for the entrée and that day’s approved healthy side dishes as they enter the venue. The discounted healthy meal option offers a pre-portioned reduced calorie alternative for those seeking a reduced-calorie meal. Elsewhere throughout the Courtyard Café there are healthy food options which are designated by Wellness & You icons.

Ongoing work of the Food Advisory Committee includes developing a strategic plan as it relates to healthy eating and maintaining menu variety, providing more 24/7 venues, reviewing cafeteria offerings as they relate to menu selections and providing additional educational materials at VUMC eating places.

More tasty cuisine online

This special issue of House Organ devoted to good eating continues online at www.vanderbilt.edu/houseorgan, where you’ll find:

- Links to recipes for tasty breakfast burritos, a vegetarian pizza with whole grain dough, and other treats
- A listing of every eatery on the Vanderbilt campus
- Information and links to campus exercise facilities
- An updated link to the News and Communications blog, Get the NAC
Life is a marathon, and eating a nutritious diet provides the fuel to get safely and happily to the finish line.

Marilyn Holmes, M.S., R.D., L.D.N., manager of Health Plus, has been a dietitian for more than 35 years and is president-elect of the Tennessee Dietetic Association. She says the prevalence of food in our culture makes proper nutrition a challenge.

“In our country, most of us are surrounded by food that is so readily available. You can just run to a vending machine, or on the drive home from work, you can decide you are hungry and just pull into a fast food place,” she said.

“But it is important to remember that the food you put in your body is your fuel. It’s what gives you the energy to do everything you want in life.”

Holmes offers these six tips for being nutritionally fit:

Power up daily.
Be sure to eat a nutritious breakfast every day to fuel you for the long haul of your day. Without breakfast, you may hit the wall.

“Breakfast” literally means to break your fast. It’s the first meal of the day after an overnight fast, and it can set the nutritional tone for the rest of your day.

“If you don’t eat breakfast, you may overeat later because you are hungrier, and you can be so hungry that you will make bad choices and just grab whatever is easy and available,” Holmes said.

She cites data from the National Weight Control Registry that shows that people who have lost weight and kept it off over time eat breakfast every day.

Don’t overdo it!
Maintaining a healthy weight is a balancing act of the calories you take in and the calories you burn off. Be sure that the road you choose includes appropriate portion sizes. Offset that occasional indulgence with increased physical activity and burn, baby, burn!

“I encourage everyone to be active at least 30 minutes most days of the week,” Holmes said. “It helps burn calories, reduces stress, makes you feel good and gives you balance in life.”

To manage portion sizes, Holmes said it’s not necessary to measure every single morsel that enters your mouth, but offers some simple guidelines:

1 serving of meat = a deck of cards or the palm of your hand
1 serving of grain = a hockey puck
1 serving of nuts = a golf ball
1 serving of raw fruits or vegetables = a baseball or the size of your fist
1 serving of cooked fruits or vegetables = half of a baseball or fist
1 serving of oil = 1 die
1 serving of cheese = 4 dice

“Once you’re familiar with proper portions in your cooking at home, then you can go out to eat and know when you have been served too much and can decide to take some home for later,” she said.
Cross train.  
Eat a variety of foods that include lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, unsaturated fats, low-fat dairy and whole grains.  

No one food provides all the nutrients a body needs, and variety is crucial to a proper diet. Holmes said the secret is finding ways to incorporate foods in a way that pleases you and will keep you coming back for more.  

“If you don’t like vegetables that much, get them through juices like V8 or incorporate them into things. If you’re making lasagna, shred some carrots in and you’ll never know they are there. Tomato sauce is also a way to increase your nutrition from vegetables and even choosing a carrot muffin can get some vegetables in your diet,” she said.

Stay hydrated.  
Choose to quench your thirst with nutritious liquids. Water and skim milk are great options to select. Avoid sugary drinks that just add empty calories.  

Holmes said some people consume as many as 1,000 calories a day just in liquids. She recommends sticking to water and juice and avoiding beverages like sodas and sugary coffees that only add empty calories.  

“The carbs in sugary beverages are digested first, giving you only empty calories. And then they may not even quench your thirst,” Holmes said. “If you don’t like the taste of plain water, add lime or lemon or packets of sugar-free flavor crystals.”

Keep your focus.  
Remember that an occasional slip-up is not the end of the world. Acknowledge that we are all human and get right back on track.  

“Nutrition is for the long haul, so everyone expects some wavers along the way,” Holmes said.  

If you know you’re going to a party, Holmes recommends making better choices during the day so you can indulge a bit when you’re out.  

“Then when you’re at the party, enjoy but don’t overdo it. Take the smallest brownie in the pan instead of the largest,” she said.  

Holmes’ favorite no-guilt special occasion treat is an angel food cake with pineapple. Simply prepare an angel food cake mix according to the package and stir in a 20-ounce can of crushed pineapple and bake. Once cool, frost with non-dairy whipped topping.  

“It’s such a beautiful cake, and I make it every time we celebrate something in our office,” Holmes said. “Most everyone is thinking about wellness and nutrition, and it’s important that we support each other in that and have healthy options at our celebrations.”

Finish strong.  
Remember that foods and beverages are for nutrition. Aim for nutrient-dense choices to make you feel great for the long run, rather than empty calories.  

Holmes said a good rule of thumb is the deeper the color, the more nutrients a food has.  

“If you color up your plate and make your food beautiful, it will be more appealing and appetizing,” she said.  

For recipes to go with the tips, check the online version of this story at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/houseorgan/
Some good news about Vanderbilt employees:

- Most of us have breakfast most days.
- We’re pretty good about not snacking too much.
- And while a lot of us weigh more than we should, we’re better off than the state and the country.

But then, there’s this: when it comes to eating five servings of fruits or vegetables a day, we’re worse than the U.S. average, and we’re worse than the Tennessee average. We’re terrible, in fact, with only 14 percent of us meeting that nutrition recommendation threshold. The United States and Tennessee averages are both around 23 percent.

Still: “If you look at most things, we’re better than the state and the U.S. as a whole,” said Lori Rolando, M.D., medical director of Health Plus, the Vanderbilt employee health and wellness program. “But there are still some things we can improve on.”

The data about the nutritional and other health habits of Vanderbilt employees are derived from eight years of annual health risk assessments collected by Health Plus.
“What the data illustrate are that a large part [of Vanderbilt] is already doing the recommended things,” Rolando said. 

Some examples:

- Percent who eat breakfast every day or most days: 76
- Percent who report eating only or mostly low-fat foods: 59
- Percent who report eating only or mostly whole grains: 60
- Percent who say they snack seldom or only a few times a week: 74
- Percent who say they never add salt to food: 49 (only 12 percent of us use salt every meal).

(Mostly) moving in the right direction

And, Rolando notes, the data also show mostly good trends over the eight years of the Health Plus health risk assessments, both in nutrition and in other health behavior categories.

**Exercise:** In 2003, 73 percent of us at Vanderbilt exercised at least one day a week. Last year, that was up to 82 percent.

**Smoking:** In 2003, just under 12 percent of Vanderbilt employees smoked; in 2010 that figure had fallen to just below 8 percent. (For comparison, the national figure in 2009 was 18 percent and the Tennessee figure was 22 percent. Vanderbilt is MUCH better than the country and state on the rate of lighting up.)

**Obesity or being overweight:** The rate of overweight or obese Vanderbilt employees has slightly increased over the past eight years, from 55 percent to 56 percent. But Rolando points out that this represents relative stability as the country and state’s percentages of people who are overweight or obese has risen much more quickly. In the same period of time, the United States rate grew from 60 percent to 64 percent, and Tennessee’s rate grew from 60 percent to 69 percent. “Our employee population being able to temper that increase and instead remain relatively stable is a significant first step in changing the trend to decrease the percentage in this category,” she said.

What could be better?

Rolando applauds the recent changes that Vanderbilt has made, including some of the actions of the Food Advisory Committee to bring healthier options to restaurants and vending machines (see story on page 3).

“If it’s important to increase health options on campus and make them more affordable,” she said. For example, the weekly seasonal farmers’ market that operates on the hospital plaza will expand this spring to a second location at One Hundred Oaks, where it will serve both the Vanderbilt employees who work there, and the larger community as well.

Rolando said she would like the awareness of good nutrition to spread even to office treats and snacks at meetings.

“We encourage each other as individuals. Friends and co-workers influence each other. People eat whatever is brought, and we can bring low-fat options to meetings or celebrations to help support each other in making healthy choices.”

But healthy habits at work alone aren’t enough. “You can go home and undo all the good you do here,” she said. “The changes at work should ideally be part of an overall commitment to a healthy lifestyle.” In that way, healthy habits gained in the workplace can carry over to home, and help transform the health of an employee, and family, for the better.

The seasonal weekly farmers’ market is a great source of fresh fruits and vegetables, and this year will also be at One Hundred Oaks.

**If you look at most things, we’re better than the state and the U.S. as a whole. But there are still some things we can improve on.**
When it comes to losing weight or making healthy challenges, the world at large is not your friend.

Jamie Pope, M.S., R.D., L.D.N., instructor of Nutrition at the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing, knows this all too well.

“Most people are very aware of what they should do, or even what they need to do,” she said. “Their ‘buts’ just get in the way. It’s a matter of identifying what their buts or obstacles to change are and coming up with strategies that help overcome them.

“To be successful at changing eating or exercise habits you have to set up your world in such a way that it is easier to accomplish your goals. When you look at people who have successfully lost weight and kept it off or made long-term changes, they set up mini environments.

“We are so strongly influenced by what is around us. So surrounding yourself with foods that are conducive to achieving your goals is imperative.”

Pope said it’s not just a matter of stocking the pantry or refrigerator with good food options, rather a person has to surround themselves with healthy options so that they are not busy fighting their environment, which includes where we live, work, learn and play.

Know your world
One of the first steps to creating a successful environment is documentation, Pope said. Self monitoring is the key to developing an awareness of what you’re doing, what you’re eating and how you’re moving.

Keeping a record of these activities is much easier with so many free, online tools available. During the first weeks of her nutrition course, she asks her students to keep a three-day record of their intake. It provides them a small but informative picture of their own habits. She then uses a simple assessment tool called Rate Your Plate to score their overall eating patterns and food choices. Based on their ratings, students establish two to three goals they want to implement over the next week.

“They find it is much harder than they think to implement their goals,” said Pope. “I find that it is very important for them to understand what they will be asking their patients or clients to do. Knowing what you need to do and doing it are two very different things.”

Pope said that only 12 percent of people have a sense of how many calories they need a day to maintain a healthy weight. Mypyramid.gov is an excellent resource that allows a user to plug in vital information in return for an estimate of what their daily caloric intake necessities are. It also provides the number of servings from each food group a person would need in order to adhere to a specific caloric regime.

Knowing what is considered a balanced diet for healthy nutrition is very individualized. Pope said that almost any meal can be adapted to create a healthy diet, but it requires that people get honest about what they are really eating. Ideal versus realistic is a hard transition, but making perception a reality is necessary to make long-term changes.

Don’t setup for a setback
But don’t make radical changes, cautioned Pope. A complete overhaul can be too overwhelming, which can be a setup for a setback.

“Soon after people develop accountability, they are more able to identify some concrete changes that can make a difference in their environments—whether that’s trimming certain foods out of their diet, reducing portion sizes, incorporating more of a particular food group into the diet or becoming more active.”
One of the biggest obstacles in establishing a positive environment for healthy food choices is portion sizes. The typical serving size has doubled or even tripled over the last two decades.

“We’ve gotten warped in what we view as a portion size,” said Pope. “What we need and what we see and expect are so different and that is part of the dilemma. We move less, we eat more and of course we are going to gain weight. Calorically, it’s mathematical.”

Pope admits that she too, as a dietitian, has problems limiting her intake.

“Something as simple as reaching into a carton of ice cream and getting just a half a cup is ridiculous. That’s really hard for me. Honestly, it’s next to impossible,” she laughed. “Instead I buy individual treats like Fudgesicles. It is much easier on many levels, especially portioning size.”

Pope suggests looking at plate size to aid in decreasing portions. She said the average size of a dinner plate has increased from 20 years ago. Today’s plate ranges from 11 inches to 12 inches. Compare that to seven to nine inches a few decades ago.

“Changing the size of your dinner plate when you eat at home is an example of an environmental strategy to reduce portion sizes and change perceptions,” she said. “Your meal will look more adequate because it fills the plate and that can translate to eating 25 to 50 percent less food.”

**Guidelines offer help**

Pope admits that healthy eating habits are not the sole responsibility of an individual. Broader societal changes, with assistance from the food industry, need to occur to help Americans in their plight to fight obesity.

Recently the USDA released its latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the federal government’s nutritional recommendations to promote healthy lifestyles, reduce the risk of chronic diseases and the prevalence of an overweight society.

Although the overall suggestions for following a balanced diet and incorporating physical activity into daily routines were generally the same, there were some startling changes.

“Because two-thirds of Americans are classified as overweight or obese,” said Pope, “this is the first set of guidelines written to an overweight population. The main message is probably that we all need to eat less and move more to slow down this obesity epidemic.”

Pope said the newest guidelines are more food specific, while in the past the suggestions leaned more toward concepts.

One recommendation that stood out to Pope concerned sodium intake. According to the new guidelines, the USDA suggests a daily sodium intake of less than 2,300 milligrams, but broadens a recommendation of less than 1,500 milligrams for people age 51 and older as well as those of any age who are African-American, have hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

“Without the cooperation and action of the food industry it is going to be next to impossible for this to work,” said Pope. “The food industry must lower the sodium in their food products—a major source of our sodium comes from processed or convenience foods.”

On average, Americans use 3,400-3,500 milligrams of sodium daily. The newest guidelines are calling for that amount to be cut in half. There has been great success in developing sugar and fat substitutes over the years, but finding an acceptable sodium replacement will be a bit trickier, Pope believes.

“It will be hard to find a substitute for sodium that tastes the same,” she said. “Stepping back from adding additional salt to your food and using herbs and spices can help as well as begin to retrain your taste buds.”

Overall, Pope said everyone can benefit from creating an environment that facilitates achieving calorie balance, nutritional needs and physical activity. These are all key strategies to developing long-term behaviors for a successful, healthy lifestyle.

The average size of a dinner plate has grown in the last 20 years. Eating off a smaller plate may help you eat a more healthy portion size.
“I have a different attitude about everything, and feeling better motivated me. Weight loss, having more energy and sleeping better at night were the byproduct of the plan I worked on in my early 50s.”
M arch 2011

Holly Walsh is naturally a fitness inspiration to others with her “just do it” motto for exercise. A mention of her name in a room full of colleagues is accompanied by praise of how great she looks, how much weight she lost and kept off over time and admiration of her well-defined, toned arms.

Adopting the Nike slogan into her everyday life, Walsh exercises six days a week. At age 62, she is sticking with her workout plan because health and fitness is nothing short of a lifestyle commitment.

“I was always involved in exercise in my 20s 30s and 40s. I would start running for a couple months or join a club for a bit, and I would stop very sporadically and go back to my old habits,” Walsh said.

“When I turned 50, I wasn’t focused on losing weight, I wanted to feel better. When you don’t have the energy you had in the past, it causes you to open your eyes.”

Walsh, the executive director of Development for the Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt, looked to Health Plus for a plan she could embrace more than 10 years ago. At the time, she traveled extensively for Vanderbilt and wanted a doable routine that was not overly aggressive.

“They sat down with me and created a plan that was very simple. We kept it to the basics and I started off with three days of exercise each week. I didn’t worry about diet at first but I kept working toward those goals and as I saw improvements, I wanted to do more,” Walsh said.

She shed 30 pounds and has kept it off.

Not a mystery

“I took their advice and 10 years later I am still taking their advice and I love it. Nothing I have done is a mystery, it’s just everything the fitness and wellness professionals tell you.”

Walsh’s love for exercise combines a mix of cardiovascular workouts, aerobics, yoga and weightlifting. One of her keys to success is that every Sunday she schedules her workouts throughout the week like business appointments. She sticks to her commitment and fits it in around her work hours in the mornings, during lunch, or immediately after work.

When she started seeing and feeling the rewards of her fitness routine, she wondered what the next benefit could be.

“I have a different attitude about everything, and feeling better motivated me. Weight loss, having more energy and sleeping better at night were the byproduct of the plan I worked on in my early 50s.”

Walsh knew she couldn’t continue to make progress and eat the same foods.

“Eating habits were never my original goal although I knew it would be a benefit. As I exercised more, I didn’t crave the high-fat foods,” Walsh said.

“That’s a constant battle. The eating I have to think about. I have my ups and downs, and then I get right back on track.”

Support is important

She is encouraged by the motivation of her supportive husband and children, who are also involved in fitness and understand the benefits of an active lifestyle. Family and friends notice her progress and comment on her journey, keeping her anxious to do more.

“They start remarking and that’s your motivator, you don’t want to let them down. How long have you been doing this? Kept your weight off? What’s your routine now? That’s a built-in support mechanism.”

For some people, it’s hard to start an exercise program and stick with it. Walsh recommends Health Plus to get started and support you through your journey.

“Start small—determine what you have time to do and what you would like to accomplish. Go to Health Plus. They will work with your schedule, and there are a variety of programs to fit everyone’s need. If you slip up, get back on track, put that behind you and start on the right foot the next day,” Walsh said.

“I have gotten to know the wonderful staff and I enjoy the camaraderie, it’s very welcoming. I appreciate the beautiful facility, we are so fortunate to have Health Plus as a free resource to employees at Vanderbilt.”

She lost weight, feels better and is overall healthier. However, she doesn’t slow down there; she has goals of increasing the intensity during her workouts, losing 5-6 pounds and incorporating more yoga into her workout schedule for increased flexibility.

It’s only fitting for Walsh—after all, when you “just do it,” you don’t stop.

Holly Walsh uses a combination of exercise and good nutrition to lose weight and keep it off.
It’s 10 a.m. and Tom Christenbery has already logged 7,381 steps on his pedometer. He isn’t bragging. He has worked hard to shed 90 pounds and keep it off for the past five years. He thinks some of the things that have worked for him, can work for others, too.

Christenbery’s journey to good health started with a conversation with his mother.

“My then 85-year-old mother was concerned I was going to have heart problems,” said Christenbery. “She was still in good health, so I thought maybe I should pay attention.”

He joined the Dayani Center’s Weight Management program in 2005 and started his journey to better health. He didn’t have a specific goal. He just wanted to lose weight.

“I told myself that these people are experts in the area. They know what they are doing. They know the latest science, so I need to surrender and follow their directions,” said Christenbery. “I realized that there was no easy way out, I had to work for it, and the Dayani team was there for me.”

The five-month Dayani & Health Plus Weight Management program included regular group meetings with the health psychologist, registered dietitian and personal trainer on topics such as making healthier food choices, customizing a physical activity program, addressing common issues that undermine motivation, and emphasis on making health a priority. It also included access to the Dayani Center for individual and group exercise.

“I like the non-judgmental approach of the staff,” said Christenbery. “They taught us to take the judgment off ourselves, too. If on a particular day, you didn’t get done the recommended exercise or slipped and had a donut, you could start over at any time—even that afternoon. So, you didn’t carry around that guilt and that garbage with you.”

The program gave Christenbery and fellow group members a set of tools to achieve their individual goals. A few things in particular clicked for him.

“They had us write down our calorie counts for two weeks, but I was ready to stop after just one. I had no idea I was taking in that amount of calories!” he said. “That was really where the alarm went off.”

Pushing beyond
During the program he responded to the personalized workout program that included both aerobic and weight work. The team emphasized the need to build muscle because more muscle meant more calories burned. They also gave everyone a pedometer. Christenbery set a 10,000 step-a-day goal for himself based on the Centers for Disease Control recommendations. When he reached that goal, he pushed beyond and set a goal of 20,000 steps a day which he still maintains.

After graduating from the weight management program, he had lost 48 pounds and 11 inches from his waist. He wasn’t winding down. He was revving up. He continued his healthy habits on his own and kept his follow-up appointments with Dayani staff.

“I bought into the routine, and I never let up,” he said.

Christenbery continued to lose weight by setting small goals that collectively would make a big impact. One example is his philosophy on walking, even on cold winter nights.

“Recently, I went walking on a 35 degree night to make sure I met my daily step goal,” he said. “I realized that I didn’t freeze to death and nothing bad happened. So, the next night I walked again, and it felt a little better. I guess you can do just about anything, if you do it one time, because the next time, it gets a little bit easier.”

For the past five years, Christenbery has been working on sustaining his good habits. He has adapted his lifestyle in several ways. Instead of the traditional coffee break, Christenbery takes “walk breaks” two or three times a day. He has different routes mapped out around the Vanderbilt campus that take around 15 minutes to complete. It increases his steps and helps
him tackle the next project on his to-do list with a clear mind.

He also attends yoga classes three times a week.

“When I started the weight management program, I would see people in the yoga class at Dayani, and I would think ‘if I can just lose enough weight I could go in there,” he said. Yoga classes are now as much a part of his routine as lifting weights three times a week and walking.

Other things that work for Christenbery include weighing himself six days a week on the same scale. If he notices a 1- or 2-pound gain, he typically adjusts his eating. As far as his day-to-day diet, he eats throughout the day, not just at meal time and doesn’t eat after dinner. His menu includes whole grains, fruits, chicken, fish and vegetables and he rarely, if ever, gets hungry.

Thinking cheeseburger—occasionally
He’s also learned a lot about himself. While many health-conscious eaters can still indulge in a brownie here and there, Christenbery knows he cannot.

“I wouldn’t take a bite of a brownie,” he said. “Others could do just fine and stop there, but I would want to have that brownie and 10 more, so I just don’t do it.”

But that doesn’t mean he goes without. Christenbery plans one meal each week that he refers to as his indulgence meal.

“I don’t want to be a person who can never have dessert or never have a cheeseburger at J. Alexander’s and think poor, pitiful me,” he said. “It’s OK for me to indulge, just not every meal in the same day.”

Christenbery feels good about his transformation and so does his now 91-year-old mother. His health care provider took him off two anti-hypertensives and one statin. Christenbery, 56, has also had a lot of fun running the Music City Half-Marathon for the past four years.

For all the progress he has made, Christenbery is not an idealist. He’s a realist.

“I am very clear in my mind that I could be back at that place at a drop of a hat for whatever reason. Even though I’ve lost weight, I’m still working at it,” he said.

“They had us write down our calorie counts for two weeks, but I was ready to stop after just one. I had no idea I was taking in that amount of calories!”

And the walking man walks. Tom Christenbery logs 20,000 steps a day on his pedometer.
elieve it or not, Paula McGown’s biggest health accomplishment isn’t that she lost 42 pounds in 1990. It’s that she’s kept it off for 21 years. “I’ve had a 1- to 2-pound variance, from time to time, but that’s it,” she says, sitting in her office at Vanderbilt University Medical Center’s Occupational Health, a bunch of bananas hanging from a hook over her left shoulder.

McGown’s motivation to lose the weight, more than two decades ago, came from within. She, like most of her family members, had been overweight all her life. One of her sisters has diabetes. Another died of a heart attack when she was 40. It was time for a change, McGown said. “I never sat down and calculated it, but I bet I was eating thousands and thousands of calories. I was eating whole bags of potato chips,” she said.

“Everybody has something that will tip them over. I was young and was just tired of being overweight, of not getting the boyfriends, of not being able to wear the cute clothes. For some people it’s wanting to see their kids graduate from high school or wanting to live to see their grandchildren. It has to be something you want. You can’t change because someone else wants you to change.”

McGown was overweight when she came to Vanderbilt for her undergraduate degree. She didn’t gain the “freshman fifteen” during her first year, and actually lost a little weight. “But I more than made up for that over the next three years,” she said.

After graduating from Vanderbilt with a Bachelor of Nursing degree, then getting a master’s degree in Nursing from Vanderbilt University School of Nursing, she was on her own, working full-time on Vanderbilt’s orthopaedic unit in 1989. “Everything hurt. My back hurt. I needed to get the weight off. Crash diets had never worked. I’d lose a little, then gradually gain it back and maybe a little more.”

Changes

And that’s when she decided to change her life. She chose a fairly new weight loss plan that offered pre-packaged portion-controlled food and lost 42 pounds in 21 weeks. She attended weekly meetings and bought all of her food from the weight loss company except for milk products, fruits and vegetables. The petite 5-foot-4 inch woman dropped from 180 pounds to her goal weight of 138. After that, she did a maintenance plan for six months (eating part pre-packaged foods and part regular food), and attended meetings first every other week, then eventually once a month. During this time she lost another 10 pounds.

The only thing missing from her weight loss plan was regular exercise. During a temporary move to a small town in Kentucky, she walked a half hour to an hour a day, because it was a small town and it was easy to get around by walking. “But walking was basically it for about six years,” she said.

After that, she moved back to her hometown in Humphreys County to work as a nurse practitioner, then came to work at Vanderbilt in 1993, first as a nurse practitioner in Occupational Health, then in Faculty/Staff Health and Wellness where she works now as administrative officer.

In the mid 1990s, she bought a pair of hand-held weights and began using them at home. She still uses them 10-15 minutes a night while she’s watching TV. A co-worker who ran marathons encouraged McGown to try and gave her a book, “The Non-Runners Marathon Trainer.” “I thought at the time, ‘Well, OK, Nashville has the Country Music Marathon. I could do that.’ I was in good health, normal weight,” she said. So in 2001 she followed the book’s training schedule which incrementally increases the number of miles you run as you build up endurance. The first week, she ran five minutes and walked five minutes for 30 minutes. Then, she progressed to running 10, walking five, until she could run solidly for a half hour. “It didn’t matter how far you went in a half hour,” she said. “Then it gave you a 16-week program where you ran four days a week.”

“Every week was something I had never done before. The first time I ran 3 miles, I had never run 3; then pretty soon it was 18 miles. Because I had never done any of those things, every week was a challenge.”

She completed her first Country Music Marathon in 2002 in under 6 hours. “I got to about the 20th mile, and didn’t feel that great, but I finished,” she said. “Staying on your feet for 26 miles is tough. You’re hurting the next day.”

The next year, she did it again. This time the training was “horrible,” because she’d already been through it, but the race was better. This time, at mile 20, she was feeling great, she said.

With the exception of a full marathon in 2009 in Memphis, she decided she prefers half marathons and now does four a year.
Yep, hang gliding

Five years ago, when she turned 40, she took up hang gliding. “You either launch off a mountain at 1,394 feet or get pulled up behind an ultralight plane and they release you at 2,000 feet and you glide down. If conditions are right, you can stay aloft for hours. You feel like you’re flying,” she said. “It involves a lot of physical exertion. You can’t be in bad shape. You have to carry the glider around on your own shoulders and you have to be able to run, downhill, to learn to launch it. You use a totally different set of muscles. I discovered when I started that I didn’t have much in the way of upper body strength.”

Even though she broke her arm early on while hang gliding, requiring a plate and eight screws and months of rehabilitation, it didn’t dampen her enthusiasm. She still does it three out of four weekends a month. “That only derailed me a little bit,” she said.

In addition to hang gliding and half marathons, she works out with weights at Health Plus on Mondays and Thursdays, and runs for at least a half hour every day, usually out the door before 5 a.m. She hasn’t missed a day of running in almost 1,000 days. “Can you tell I’m a little obsessive about it?” she laughs.

“I used to take one day a week and not run, but for some reason, a few summers ago, I got past the Fourth of July and thought ‘I wonder how long I can do this?’ I got to 100 days and kind of kept going, even the day after a marathon. I don’t know how long I can keep this up,” adding that she won’t run in a thunderstorm, but will run in rain, drizzle or snow. She even bought a pair of Yaktrax (like snow chains for your shoes) to give her more traction in the snow.

McGown said she thinks if she stopped exercising she might gain back some of her weight, but the main benefit of exercising is how well she feels afterward. She is still very careful about her diet, eating sensibly and in moderation. “If I want a bite of cake, I may as well take a bite or two, get it over with and go on with life. If I don’t, then it builds up and I want a whole slice of cake.”

She limits sweets in her diet, and will not drink regular soft drinks or drinks high in calories. She also chooses whole fruit over fruit juice. “I would rather have a glass of water and a piece of fruit. You feel full longer and get more fiber that way.”

“It sounds so cliché, but it’s so true—you just need to eat less and exercise more,” she said. “It just isn’t quite that easy.”

Paula McGown’s routine involves lifting weights at Health Plus twice a week. And running. And hang gliding.
test, as boy Ayden poses with Rudy, the ball python, in the photo submitted by Scott Dupree of Dermatology.

More than 5,000 total votes poured into the House Organ website over the almost two weeks of voting. This was substantial growth over the 2,800 or so votes that were cast last year, and probably represents the ability of more people to hear about the contest via Facebook and other social media.

Participants were limited to one vote per computer, following the event from our first pet poll, three years ago, which some of my cruel co-workers never tire of bringing up. In that poll, I had decided that it would be great fun to set up the voting American Idol-style, with an unlimited number of votes allowed. This proved not to be a good decision on my part, in the sense that enthusiastic voters set up automated voting programs to pour support to their favorite candidates at such a rate that University computing services were threatened with overload.

Beagles were slugging it out with bulldogs, calicoces with tabbies, and smoke was pouring from University servers. We had to end the voting early, but even then in turned out that more votes were cast in the House Organ Pet Poll than either candidate received in the presidential election in Tennessee that year.

We learned, we changed, and the pet poll now can provide fun and amusement without endangering vital University services, always a worthy goal.

Thanks to those who submitted photos, thanks to those who had fun with the voting, and congratulations to the winners, who now have the only prize the poll offers: eternal bragging rights.

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**Call for Entries: House Organ Writing Contest**

*27th Annual House Organ Writing Contest Deadline May 9*

For the 27th year, the July *House Organ* will be the Summer Reading Issue, filled with the winners of the *House Organ* Writing Contest—poems, short stories and nonfiction pieces contributed by Vanderbilt staff, faculty and students.

Every year demonstrates that Vanderbilt has a lot of people with literary talent walking around disguised as regular people, and the *House Organ* Writing Contest is a chance to show everybody what you can do.

**Three categories**

There are three categories: poetry, fiction and nonfiction.

There are no length restrictions in the poetry category.

The fiction category is limited to 4,000 words.

The nonfiction category, which encompasses journalistic writing, memoirs, feature stories, historical pieces, profiles of interesting people, or anything else that’s true, also has a 4,000-word limit.

Please indicate the category of your entry; sometimes it’s a little hard for the judges to figure out what is fiction and what is nonfiction.

All Vanderbilt staff and faculty, except those who work in News and Communications, are eligible. Medical, nursing and graduate students are also eligible.

Submissions are limited to three per category. Each entry must be submitted online as an attachment in Microsoft Word (or other compatible format), and have the author’s name, place of employment or school, and a phone number at the top of the first page. Entries may be sent to wayne.wood@vanderbilt.edu. Please put “writing contest entry” in the subject line.

Entries may be edited for space, clarity or style before publication.

Deadline for entry is Monday, May 9. Please push the send button before midnight on that day.

The winners will be published in *House Organ*. In past years, it has also been possible to publish some honorable mentions, either in the print edition or online.

Address any questions to the editor, Wayne Wood, at 322-4747, or at the e-mail address above.

**Checklist for entries**

Author information: Name, department or school, address and phone number on first page.

Entry information: Category—fiction, nonfiction or poetry. Check to be sure your work is within the length requirement.

Entries must be sent as an attachment in Microsoft Word (or other compatible format). Deadline is May 9.