

Weighing in on Health

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Two second-year students at the Tulane University School of Medicine are getting a head start on helping the community get healthy with Don't Weight to Lose, a nonprofit organization designed to educate New Orleans residents about maintaining a healthy weight and improving their food choices.



Jacques Courseault, left, and Ryan Jupiter, right, will introduce their Don't Weight to Lose program at the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church this month to inform church members about how to stay healthy. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Jacques Courseault of Atlanta and Ryan Jupiter of New Orleans are the organizers of the program that kicks off on Sunday (April 27) at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans.

Both Courseault and Jupiter are longtime members of the church. Nearly 300 of the church's 8,000 members have signed on to participate in the organization's first program.

Courseault says the church, which is predominately African American, is the perfect starting point for the program because of the prevalence of obesity, diabetes and cancer among members of the community.

"The lives of African Americans were disproportionately affected during Hurricane Katrina," says Courseault, who is the lead program designer because of his background in personal training and experience teaching group exercise. "The church gets them back into shape spiritually and by doing this we are helping them physically."

With the help of other Tulane medical student volunteers, [Don't Weight to Lose](#) participants will become part of an intervention group that meets regularly over a period of one year. Group leaders will provide participants with tips on exercise techniques, nutrition information, health screenings and individual consultations based on the exercise and diet diaries that each person is required to keep.

Each participant receives a "power pack" that includes exercise illustrations, a resistance band, a pedometer and a DVD that features Courseault demonstrating exercise routines discussed in the sessions.

Courseault and Jupiter started developing Don't Weight to Lose last year following the success of Courseault's ["Fat Tuesday"](#) program, which allows [Tulane Reilly Center](#) patrons to track changes in their fat and muscle mass.

"Now that we're in medical school, we have the knowledge and the resources to educate people on things that can save lives," says Courseault. "Our goal is to teach our participants that it's not about how you look, it's how healthy you are. Looking great and feeling great follow healthy behaviors."

Tulane medical faculty members advise the program and oversee the information disseminated by the students.

Dr. Timothy Harlan, an assistant professor of medicine, is advising the students on the nutrition portion of their program. He says the initiative put forward by the students "isn't normal anywhere but at Tulane."

According to Harlan, "In New Orleans and the South there are cultural issues that go along with obesity. What [these medical students] are doing has the capability to be generalized across the nation."

Undergraduate premedical students at Tulane may volunteer to assist with the program by sending an [e-mail](#) message to the organizers.