

HOW A STATE LOST WEIGHT

COLORADO HAS LOTS OF FIT PEOPLE. BUT ONE TOWN IN PARTICULAR HAS LESSONS FOR ALL OF US. HERE ARE THE SIX SECRETS TO ITS SUCCESS. **DO TRY THIS AT HOME ...**

BY RACHEL LEVIN | PHOTOGRAPHS BY BROWN CANNON III



Colorado obesity rate

17.8%

versus

National average obesity rate

34%

WELCOME TO BROOMFIELD

Broomfield could easily have been the quintessential American (read, overweight) town. Although it's only a half-hour from Boulder, it's much more mainstream America than that famously athletic university town. Residents spend more time commuting than rock climbing. "Going up to the mountains on weekends is not something everyone here does," says resident Shawn Gorman.

But instead of succumbing to the battle of the bulge, Broomfield became one of the first Colorado cities to participate in the America on the Move program (aom.americaonthemove.org), cofounded in 2002 by obesity expert James O. Hill, director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado Denver.



Case study Broomfield, CO

What it is: An average Western town

What it's not: Boulder

Population: 54,526

Average commute: 30 minutes per day

Median age: 33.2

Median household income: \$67,622

Shopping centers: 10, including the 1.5 million-square-foot FlatIron Crossing mall

Elevation: 5,400 feet

Trails: More than 66 miles of multiuse trails

Open space: 16 acres for every 1,000 residents



1 KEEP THE RULES SIMPLE: WALK MORE, EAT LESS

Hill wanted to make AOM easy to participate in. The principles are straightforward.

WALK MORE Increase the number of steps you take daily by 2,000, with an ultimate goal of reaching 10,000 a day. The average American walks only 5,300 steps a day.

EAT LESS Cut 100 calories from your recommended daily diet.

When it comes to vigorous walks at sunset, Broomfield County Commons is every bit as appealing as Boulder's open space.

2 GET THE COMMUNITY INVOLVED

Gorman and fellow coordinator Candice Smith advertised the city's first AOM Get Fit Challenge in the local media and on community bulletin boards. Seventy people showed up. The next one drew 370.

At the start, says exercise physiologist Natalie Allinson, who conducted the participants' weekly weigh-ins, "I'd have people who'd get on the scale backward because they didn't want to see their weight." Gradually, enthusiasm increased. "People began watching what they ordered at McDonald's or Macaroni Grill," Allinson says. "They'd eat half their dinner and increase their steps."



Candice Smith is a coordinator of America on the Move in Broomfield.



3 SUPPLY THE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Besides the weigh-ins, participants received pedometers to track their steps, plus diet and exercise advice.

AOM also posts signs around town to let locals know how many steps it is from the parking lot of a business to its front door.



4 SET UP GROUPS AND CLASSES

Some Broomfield businesses joined in the effort. A hair salon started a walking group with its patrons. And a pizza parlor bought sneakers for its employees.

AOM also set up free nutritional cooking classes, as well as salsa and ballroom dancing lessons.

Best of all, residents meet up at the community commons for low-key walks. For participants like Amanda Smith, a 31-year-old mother of three who lost 32 pounds thanks primarily to AOM, these evening walks are more than just exercise; they're fun. "We have the most wonderful sunsets against the mountains," she says.



5 USE THE CLIMATE TO YOUR BEST ADVANTAGE

AOM cofounder Hill notes that Colorado has a fitness-friendly climate: “Not too cold, not too hot, 300 sunny days a year.” Even in winter, Broomfield’s many trails and open-space preserves (see Broomfield’s stats on page 61) are good for hiking or, if it snows, snowshoeing.



6 THINK OF IT AS ENHANCING YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE

“People here value healthy lifestyles,” Hill says. “People move here because of it.” And the program has helped Amanda Smith rediscover these values. “Once you start seriously losing weight,” she says, “you get pumped up. Before, my kids would say, ‘Let’s go to the park,’ and I’d say, ‘No, Mom’s tired.’ Not anymore.”

More Colorado success stories

Aurora For the Waist Away Your Summer Challenge, city employees walked more than 12 million steps from June through August.

Lafayette Escuela Bilingüe Pioneer Elementary School started its own grocery, El Mercado, to sell fresh fruits and vegetables to its students for box tops or “Pioneer Pesos.”

Teller County Residents tried the Flat14ers program—walking the number of steps needed to get them to the summit of one of Colorado’s famed 14,000-foot peaks. ■