

**START FOR LIFE™ is new  
YMCA of Metro Atlanta wellness research program**

**Program goal is to prevent childhood obesity by increasing physical activity  
and improving health risks in young children**

ATLANTA (February 3, 2011) -- Childhood obesity is an increasing problem in the U.S. The prevalence of obesity among children two to five years old has increased to 15 percent. Research shows that recommended amounts of physical activity to develop normal growth patterns and prevent obesity in young children are lacking in preschool settings.

The YMCA of Metro Atlanta is adding a new wellness research and development program, Start For Life™, which targets children three to five years old to prevent childhood obesity. A grant by Kaiser Permanente supports Start For Life™, which consists of 30 minutes of moderate- and vigorous-intensity exercise, five days a week, delivered by preschool teachers during the regular school day.

“Every child needs to begin kindergarten prepared, and Start For Life™ will help to establish healthy physical, mental and emotional growth,” says Jim Annesi, YMCA of Metro Atlanta director of wellness advancement. “A significant – and very exciting – piece of the program is being able to track healthy growth patterns of these children throughout their formative school years. Physical activity is the key.”

In collaboration with YMCA-affiliated preschools, Start For Life™ lessons allow more time in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, which is used as an adjunct to academic learning time. The program has a special component that helps children to develop the behavioral skills to continue their physical activity, thus encouraging perceptions of physical ability. Training in these methods is provided to preschool teachers, school administrators and YMCA wellness staff.

Start For Life™ is the initial phase of a four-phase longitudinal project on child obesity prevention and intervention. This project will track a series of health-promotion treatments over the same children for 13 years, from age three to age 16.

As the Y’s project director – wellness programs, Alice Smith is responsible for the overall management of specific wellness programs, especially those advancing the health of children within the communities the Y serves. She brings a diverse background and extensive professional experience in health promotion to the Y.

Smith began her career as a public health nutritionist in Chicago, and then moved to Children's Memorial Hospital of Chicago where she directed various programs and departments concerning food services, dietetics and clinical nutrition. Upon moving to Atlanta, Smith was manager of nutrition and patient services at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta then served as manager and program director of child health promotions for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta for more than 10 years.

The Y is a powerful association of men, women and children joined together by a shared commitment to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility. Every day, we work side-by-side with our neighbors to make sure everyone, regardless of age, income or background, has the opportunity to learn grow and connect. Contact the YMCA of Metro Atlanta at (404) 588-9622 or [www.ymcaatlanta.org](http://www.ymcaatlanta.org).

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