

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.**

For more information, contact  
Elizabeth Maynard Garrett, APR  
UTHSC Communications and Marketing  
(901) 448-4957

**HEALTH STUDY REVEALS MANY MEMPHIANS AT RISK**

Memphis, Tennessee (January 20, 2005) -- Do you know your BMI? Probably not. And you are not alone. In fact, according to the recently released results of the first Memphis Behavioral Risk Factors Survey (Memphis BRFS), nearly 85% of Shelby County adults do not know their Body Mass Index (BMI). For that matter, most people don't know their blood pressure or their cholesterol numbers either. What difference does that make? Quite possibly, the difference between life and early death.

Marion Hare, MD, University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) pediatrician and co-author of the survey report, commented that no one should relax until they know their numbers. "Each Memphian needs to know if he or she has the 'metabolic syndrome', a dangerous pre-diabetic state caused by being overweight and inactive. As many as one out of two Memphians may have pre-diabetes, and many don't know it," she noted.

According to the Memphis BRFS report, scientists used to think that overweight, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol were all different diseases. Now they know that these diseases are usually part of one "metabolic syndrome" that is frequently deadly, dramatically boosting one's chances of heart attack, heart failure, stroke, cancer, premature disability and early death.

"Pre-diabetes is caused by poor diet and exercise habits, so it is critical that people know their numbers and take charge of their own health," said Dr. Hare. "Also, this is not just an adult problem, it's a family problem. We are seeing many young children with pre-diabetes. Children first learn poor eating and physical activity habits at home. Unfortunately, these bad health habits are often reinforced at schools where physical activity is rare and junk food is often handy."

“If your health providers don’t give you both your own and your child’s BMI, blood pressure, and cholesterol numbers, you need to ask,” Dr. Hare stated.

This landmark study of Memphis and Shelby County’s health was conducted as a joint effort of the University of Memphis (U of M) and the UTHSC. Dr. Hare, a key research partner, points to just a few of the startling findings:

- About two of every three adults in Memphis and Shelby County are overweight or obese, whether black, white, male, female, young or old.
- Almost one in 10 Memphis adults already have diabetes, which is higher than the national average.
- One in three adults have high blood pressure, which is higher than the national average.

“As we can see, fat, in particular, does not discriminate. It will attack those with an unhealthy diet and a sedentary lifestyle,” commented Dr. Hare. “The bottom line is that people who are physically active are healthier regardless of their weight status; and if they need to lose weight, it will be easier to do if they are already engaged in regular physical activity.”

The study reveals that while most overweight Memphians are trying to lose weight, the most commonly cited barrier is the lack of a convenient place to exercise (42.5%).

In response to this finding, Dr. Hare noted, “Healthcare providers need to give people alternatives to exercising at a gym. We need to suggest ways to be physically active at home or at work.”

“The broader questions are: what are we as individuals and a community going to do about these results and how are we going to engage Memphians to take the steps necessary to change their lifestyles and improve their health?” she said.

The Healthy Memphis Common Table (HMCT), which helped to spearhead the survey of over 850 Memphis and Shelby County residents, is working with its many Community Partners to galvanize the Memphis community to respond to this crisis.

The 2004 study was designed and implemented under the direction of David Forde, PhD, of the University of Memphis Mid-South Social Survey Program and Jim

Bailey, MD, of the UT/U of M Healthy Memphis Data Center, with the support of the Urban Child Institute.

“It is one study that will not sit on a shelf and gather dust; rather, this survey provides important benchmark data for Memphis and ongoing annual surveys which will allow tracking of local disease prevalence, health behaviors and perceived barriers to a healthy lifestyle,” said Dr. Hare.

“To make effective changes and to know if you've made real changes you have to know your numbers. We are finding out how unhealthy Memphis is at baseline, and why we are unhealthy, in order to help our community effectively combat the epidemic of obesity, diabetes and associated poor health,” concluded Dr. Bailey.

The full report is available on-line at <http://msss.memphis.edu/>

###