Most participants in *A New You: Health for Every Body* have been adult females. Adult males also face challenges with regard to achieving healthy lifestyles related to food, physical activity and body image. To reach more adult males, ideas and insights were collected from men through the following mechanisms:

1. Literature review.
2. Electronic request for ideas from a national list serv of nutrition educators.
3. Discussion group with men employed full-time in a traditional male blue-collar worksite. These men had not participated in the *A New You: Health for Every Body* program but did receive an overview of the curriculum. Most of these men have children.
4. Discussion group and interview with males who had participated in the full *A New You: Health for Every Body* program through a 6-session class. All of these men were at or near retirement.

### Barriers to Participating

1. **Time and Personal Commitments**

   Men who are working full time shared that when they get home from work they do not want to go back out in the evening, they want to stay home. Men caring for children found an after-work class difficult to attend.

   The men at or near retirement age admitted they probably would not have participated in the program 5, 10 or 15 years earlier because working and raising children were their priorities. They identified this as a real challenge for reaching younger men.

2. **Motivation**

   Some men said their initial response to the class was, “I don’t need it.” However, they went on to share that they believe they do need this kind of program and it would be beneficial for their health. They admitted they would be reluctant to make the class a priority if they had to take it in their leisure time.

3. **Change is hard**

   Some men told us they resist change because change is hard and it is easier to continue with current behaviors. They speculated that women may be more support-group oriented where men may think, “I can change by myself. I don’t need a group.”

4. **Relevance**

   The full-time employed males said the program would not address their health issues because they are healthy and able to do their jobs. They went on to say they believed they could improve their health and that if they were honest, they are not as healthy as they could be and they needed to increase physical activity and improve eating behaviors.
However, men who were at or near retirement told a different story. They see retirement as a time of lifestyle change and believed *A New You: Health for Every Body* was very important for their continued health since it provides strategies and skills for making positive health behavior choices.

Some researchers suggest that compared to females, males are less interested and less knowledgeable in health matters, and thus are not as attentive to self care practices. Studies show that men access medical care less frequently than women, yet when they do, the conditions are often serious. The delayed treatment is often less effective than if the treatment had started with and earlier diagnosis (Randolfi).

5. **Expenses**
Men in both groups indicated they were hesitant to pay for a health class for themselves.

6. **Female Issues**
Men who did not take the class but had a brief overview thought the non-diet approach and body image issues may be geared more for women. In contrast, men who participated in the program said the body image lessons were very important. They saw relevance for themselves as well as for the women in their lives.

### Addressing the Barriers:
**Marketing and Teaching to Male Audiences**

1. **Market to specific groups of men.** Conduct needs assessments, short surveys or discussion groups with men in the target audience to determine best dates, times and approaches. Once a class is going, encourage word-of-mouth support for future classes.

2. **Consider culturally appropriate marketing strategies.** For example, offer an early fall class as a pre-hunting program in preparation for meals away from home and increased physical activity. With this approach, you can add some information on outdoor meals.

3. **Address characteristics often associated with men.** Emphasize how health behaviors supported in the class increase performance, endurance, energy, virility, and strength to be the best they can be. Highlight male resources in the resource list and have some available for participants to check out.

4. **Some men are interested in competitiveness.** If this seems to be true for your target group, consider teams of men within a larger group. This could be different business locations (bank vs. bank) or groups within the same business (street department vs. parks department). If you sponsor a lunchtime walking program as part of *A New You: Health for Every Body* and no men are walking, consider basketball, an indoor golfing range, or other forms of competitive physical activity.

5. **At worksites, men suggested offering classes by divisions or departments so they could reinforce and process the concepts between classes.** Men who took the program enjoyed participating with their spouses. Depending upon your target group, all-male, all-couple,
or mixed classes can be offered. A challenge we encountered with mixed enrollment classes is when only one male participated with an otherwise all-female class. The single male was less comfortable than when there were two or more men in the class.

6. Provide men what they need by packaging it in what they want – design your message in a format that will be heard. Rather than disease avoidance, focus on optimal health and feeling good to be at their best. (Randolfi)

7. Consider utilizing peer educators to create context, serve as role models, provide encouragement, respond to employee needs, and coordinate mock competitions or worksite groups. These people are peers of your target group and can assist you in customizing the program and the approach to meet the group’s needs. (Larkey)

8. Understand gender and age differences in health status, health behaviors and health outcomes – even with employees in the same worksite. For example, research shows women are more dissatisfied with their weight than men. (Ziebland et al.) Of men who are dissatisfied with their bodies, some want to lose weight and some want to be bigger. One study showed a 50-50 split among men who wanted to gain or lose weight, but virtually no women wished to be heavier. (Zabinski, et al.)

9. The full-time employed men strongly expressed the view that this type of curriculum should be a required component in a comprehensive employee wellness program. It should be viewed as part of the employee benefit package offered as part of the work day. They liked the idea of participating with their peers. They further thought such a wellness program should include incentives for employees attempting and/or reaching goals.

The supervisors felt there were benefits to the employer, including potential reduction in worker’s compensation claims and health insurance claims. Their enthusiasm for the idea grew to include access to physical activity facilities as an additional wellness benefit (for example, reduced fees, better hours, worksite-based equipment). While beyond the scope of the WIN the Rockies’ work to date, the idea of inclusion of A New You: Health for Every Body as a wellness benefit may be something to pursue with local employers.

10. Discussions about the gender of the facilitator brought mixed responses. It appears the gender of the facilitator was less important than the content and his/her ability to present the information and lead appropriate group interactions.

11. Regarding body image, men reported that “appearance” or “looks” issues are somewhat dependent upon people’s jobs and their peers. They agreed this component of the program was helpful. Thus, use male examples when possible. For example, in the media lesson, obtain popular male magazines to review as well as the female magazines.

Another body image perspective shared by the men was their increased awareness of these issues for the women in their lives as well as for their male and female children. Discussions around role modeling acceptance of body-size diversity can be very enlightening and useful.
12. Make the classes convenient and easy to attend. Perhaps offer a noontime program with a focus on pleasurable and healthful lunches and use part of the lunch hour for physical activity. Carefully consider class location, time, dates, cost, etc. For example, in a farming community, avoid planting and harvest times.

13. About half of the men we talked with indicated their wives would or could be the instigator for health behavior changes. They said, “The best way to get me involved in this class is to tell my wife about it.” They shared that in our society, women are traditionally assigned the “social” or “food” tasks.

14. Physical activity is a good hook to get men involved. Several of the participants we spoke with were also in a pedometer program. Some of them indicated they liked the walking program but did not care for the physical activity breaks during the classes. One man said, “I don’t like to exercise in front of other people.” Consider other physical activity options for male classes such as group walks or games. We suggest including this topic in your needs assessment/survey with your target group.

15. Promote the classes through presentations to men’s organizations.

16. Many of the male participants in the classes indicated they did not care for the journaling component and were not attentive to the On Your Own Learning (homework) assignments. They did, however, keep track of walking steps in the pedometer program – another form of tracking progress for behavior change. They also said they spent time between classes processing the information with their spouse, friends, co-workers and relatives.

Therefore, you may want to provide alternatives such as using the journals to record or track a behavior numerically, and processing the topics with others as On Your Own Learning assignments.

17. Other health professionals have shared that men often like to score or rate their health with a numerical value they can then compare to a reference value. To date, no such tool has been identified for this curriculum.

What did they like best?

When the males who had completed the program were asked what different elements had appealed to them, they identified several.

The concept of portion sizes, hunger and fullness, and the clean plate club seemed to impact the men the most. They shared several examples of changes they had already made in their eating patterns. For example, one man said he and his wife love buffets and always ate to the point of being overfull. For the first time, they recently left a buffet and were satisfied but not overstuffed, and they talked about how good it felt. Another man said that he and his wife had purchased smaller plates for their meals. Yet another man said he was using a small bowl for his television-viewing snacks instead of sitting down with a whole bag.
The men were also interested in the class discussions about forbidden foods, enjoyment of food, and unconscious eating. They shared many stories of how they had talked about these ideas with friends, co-workers and relatives.

Male participants voiced opinions about the physical activity components. While they saw the physical activity breaks as interesting but not very useful, they did like the physical activity lessons and the walking program (some were additionally enrolled in a pedometer program). They reported having increased energy. Several said they had created a new physical activity habit or routine and would like some form of follow-up to help them stay motivated.

What Men Say

As part of the qualitative research component with WIN the Rockies, individuals and groups were interviewed to collect narratives or life stories related to food, physical activity and body image. These were published in the book, *Let their voices be heard*. Several enlightening quotes from men have been selected and are featured in the handout *What Men Say*. Selected quotes could be used to promote the class and/or to spark class discussions.

Sources:


