



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
James Sanders Jr.

Sanders Promotes Good Nutrition, Disease Prevention, with Jamaica Health Fair

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 11, 2016



State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village) hosted a health fair Thursday to educate the community about nutrition, healthy living and chronic disease prevention. The event, which was held at Bethany Baptist Church in South Jamaica, featured free heart screenings, blood pressure tests and a Zumba exercise class. Attendees were also given complimentary fruits and vegetables, which included cantaloupe, strawberries, apples, oranges and bananas, as well as seeds so they could plant their own fresh greens.

“We all should be doing more to stay active and eat healthy so that we can enjoy a long, happy life,” Sanders said. “Today, we are going to learn from health experts in our own community just how to do that.”

The event got off to an energetic start as Zumba Fitness Dance Instructor Tony Santiago, also known as “Zumbro,” got the crowd on their feet and moving, doing simple exercises that were both fun and beneficial. Santiago touted the benefits of Zumba, which helped him accelerate his own weight loss journey. He started taking the exercise classes in 2012 when he weighed 300 pounds, and in 2014 he became an instructor himself.

Elizabeth Madison, a registered dietician with a practice in Springfield Gardens, also spoke about how her being overweight prompted her to take control of her life and pursue a career in health. She was an emotional eater, meaning someone who *eats* as a way to suppress or soothe negative emotions. In 2002, she weighed 284, but since then she has lost 115 pounds and kept it off. Now, she dedicates her time to helping others.

Madison told attendees that they only need to lose 10 percent of their current body weight to make a positive impact on their health, adding that people could accomplish that through small lifestyle changes. She said one of the key elements to weight loss is to understand the math. By reducing portion sizes and eliminating 500 calories a day, a person could lose one pound per week, and over time that adds up.

“I always tell my clients: ‘You are not on a diet, you are on a wellness journey,’” Madison said. “It’s all about having a variety of food and enjoying the process.”

Madison offered five key tips to health weight loss: Eat three meals and one to two snacks daily, make sure every meal includes a protein, aim to include 23 to 35 grams of fiber each

day, manage your portions, and eat slowly, taking time to really enjoy your meal.

In order to really appreciate the food you are consuming, you need good teeth. Dr. Jonathan Sheng of the Dental Department at Jamaica Hospital spoke about the connection between good health and proper oral hygiene, particularly for those who diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis. Sheng cited a recent study, which found that people with serious gum disease were 40 percent more likely to have a chronic medical condition.

He instructed attendees to brush their teeth twice a day and floss once a day. Sheng also suggested using a mouth rinse with fluoride, because it helps strengthen tooth enamel and prevent cavities. He said contrary to popular belief consuming a lot of sugar does not cause tooth decay, but rather the amount of time the sugar stays in one's mouth. For example, soda is particularly harmful because it pools inside of the mouth and the acids and sugars remain there for a long time, causing erosion and dental cavities.

Sheng suggested replacing soda with fluoridated water. He recommended eating dairy products like yogurt, cheeses and milk because they contain protein and calcium which can strengthen teeth. He also suggested adding lean meats to one's diet such as proteins and fish which are beneficial because they contain phosphorous. Consuming fruits and vegetables as part of a balanced diet, Sheng said, can increase salivary flow and the fibers contained within them can act as a natural toothbrush.

It is said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and that was certainly the message being conveyed by Dr. Perry Frankel of Advanced Cardiovascular Diagnostics who provided free heart screenings at the event including the Carotid Doppler, Abdominal Aorta Ultrasound, Ankle Brachial Index (ABI), and Vestibular Exam.

Frankel said the number one cause of death in America is heart disease, but it is also the most preventable if symptoms are identified early through medical screenings like the ones he was providing for attendees. The same is true of stroke, Frankel said, noting that 75 percent of people who have a stroke don't know they have a blockage in the carotid artery.

“What is the point of doing an ultra sound in the emergency room after someone has had a stroke when one out of three don't survive, and two out of three suffer a long term disability,” Frankel said. “The time to get tested is now, right here.”

Another chronic disease that was a topic of discussion at the event was diabetes, which affects 30 million Americans. Dr. Andrew Rubin, a podiatrist with Jamaica Hospital, said many people ignore the symptoms of diabetes which include frequent urination, blurry vision, extreme fatigue, and tingling in the hands and feet. Diabetes can lead to heart disease, neuropathy, chronic infections, stroke, blindness and kidney disease.

Unfortunately, Ruben said, often times when someone is diagnosed with diabetes, they often neglect to take their medication or follow a proper diet because the disease is not painful like other conditions such as arthritis and asthma which can hinder everyday life tasks. However, ignoring the disease can have dire consequences. Ruben cited the example of his own grandmother, who fell into a coma and eventually died after her uncontrolled diabetes caused an infection in her toe, which she ignored, and it eventually spread to her leg causing gangrene.

“The moral of the story is, if you have diabetes, it's never too late – get it under control,” Rubin said. “It's a big sacrifice, but while you are still healthy, you have a fighting chance. It's when you let your body go, that it becomes a difficult uphill battle.”

Other featured guests at the event included: NYC Department for the Aging, NYC Department of Health, Cornell Cooperative Extension, National Hook-Up of Black Women Inc., New York Road Runners, Blink Fitness, Queens Sickle Cell Advocacy Network and Soul Group.

We would like to thank our sponsors C-Town, Fine Fair Supermarket, and C. Verdino and Sons.