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CNN Hero: Stop supersizing, America!

By Linda Fondren, special to HLN
updated 12:30 PM EDT, Thu September 20, 2012

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- Linda Fondren is helping Mississippi lose its 'most obese state' label
- The 2010 top 10 CNN Hero says we should all take obesity risks seriously
- She says obesity affects everyone in the U.S., not just those who are already obese



RACHEL HOLLOWELL

Editor's note: **Linda Fondren** is the founder of **Shape Up Vicksburg**, an organization with the goal to reduce obesity in Mississippi. Because of her efforts, her hometown lost a total of 15,000 pounds and CNN recognized her as a Top 10 **CNN Hero of 2010**. The top 10 CNN Heroes of 2012 have been announced, so **vote** for who you want to be Hero of the Year this year!

I grew up in Vicksburg, Mississippi. My state is not only the fattest in the

country; it's also the poorest. If there is a hot zone for America's obesity crisis, I'm living in it.



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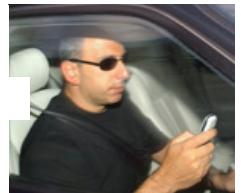
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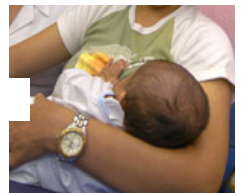
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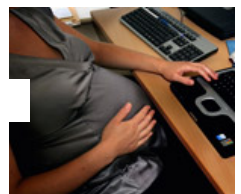
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The rest of the country has been able to use Mississippi as a scapegoat and has become desensitized to obesity. But when Colorado -- the "thinnest" state in the United States -- is **projected** to be over 45% obese in 2030, that is scary. How can we ignore the fact that the healthiest state, the best we have to offer, will have a population that is more than 45% obese?

Many people read the list of the fattest states and when their state isn't in the top 10, they think, "Oh well, we don't have to worry about it." We all need to worry. As the **study** indicates, this problem isn't subsiding -- it is supersizing.

The real tragedy of these numbers is that they are preventable. Obesity is preventable and type II diabetes is preventable. Three weeks ago, political leaders in Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana were declaring a state of emergency. Hurricane Isaac was going to hit somewhere between Mobile and New Orleans. People were talking nonstop about what to do to prepare, how to save lives and the dangers that could become reality. Then they put huge amounts of time and energy into preparing for the potential crisis.

Well, we have a crisis right now, and it's a lot more predictable than Hurricane Isaac. We are not at the mercy of a force of nature that we cannot control. We can prevent this epidemic from spreading. We spend **billions of dollars** on health care for issues that stem directly from obesity, lack of physical activity and poor nutrition. The numbers are staggering and most people cannot even wrap their heads around them. But what is even more shocking is that we can change it.

In the fight against obesity, our main enemy is not body fat, but the lack of time, money, self-confidence, good role models, and a host of other factors that keep people locked in an unhealthy lifestyle. People have to know what they're up against.

Not only has the United States become supersized, but supersized is now the norm. When you go to the store, you have to look hard for a food item that is a single serving. When you go to the movies, sodas, popcorn, and candy are now packaged for a family-sized appetite but are being sold to individuals. Most people do not know what a single serving is and very few think that they have a problem with portion control.

Take a look at what actions have been taken to accommodate the increase in the average person's size: Bigger seats in the waiting rooms of hospitals, bigger desks for children at school, bigger toilets. Airlines require large people to purchase two seats. Hotel beds are bigger with bigger bedspreads to cover them. Look for doors to become increasingly wider and restaurant booths to change to tables and chairs.

When over half of your state is obese, you don't see the problem anymore. It has become minimized in the backdrop of the increased occurrence of overweight people.

We are allowing this epidemic to fester by accommodating rather than preventing.

What happens in 2050? 2070? Will we be 100% obese? Do we change things then? How bad does it have to get before we tackle this state of emergency?

We must join together and find credible, creative ways to work on solutions. People want to do better, but they need help. And it takes a multi-faceted effort by all people, not just those who are obese.

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