

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

From left, Dusty Bright, Dustin Eades and Ralph Welsh walk on treadmills at the Core 24 gym. Research on South Carolina counties showed most adults over the age of 20 participate in some sort of physical activity.

Survey: Oconee 17th healthiest county in SC

BY MONICA KREBER
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SENECA — A recent study ranks Oconee as the 17th healthiest county in South Carolina.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute recently ranked county health rates nationwide.

The research looked at indicators such as premature deaths, smoking, obesity, crime, access to health care and more, and then ranked them in terms of health outcomes and health factors.

Beaufort County was ranked the No.1 healthiest county while Greenville ranked fifth, Pickens ranked 11th and Anderson ranked 15th.

Ed Leap, emergency physician at Oconee Medical Center, said compared to the counties behind Oconee, 17 is not a bad number.

"I think it is a good thing," Leap said.

Countyhealthrankings.org reported Oconee County has an adult obesity rate (a body mass index greater than 30) of 31 percent. It also has an excessive drinking rate of 13 percent and a rate of 26 percent of adults over the age of 20 who have no leisure time or physical activity. The study showed a teen birth rate of 51 per 1,000 females between the ages of 15 and 19.

Leap said the ranking initially surprised him – having been in a career that involves dealing with patients who have been in drunken driving accidents or overdosed on drugs – he expected the number to be worse.

However, he said he thinks the reason Oconee is number 17 is because the county has really good health care.

"We have a great hospital, and great doctors and nurses," he said.

Leap also said people in Oconee County are outside a lot more with so many hiking and water activities available and since the No. 1 industry is agriculture, the area has a lot of farmers.

"We have a lot more outdoor activity," he said. "Our environment suits us."

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