

Slimmed doctor weighs in

By Jeremy Smerd

Lost: 67 pounds of fat, 12 inches of waistline and the fear of dying young.

Dr. José Rodríguez could be the symbol for the borough's fight against its latest epidemics: obesity and diabetes. Rodríguez, 33, shed the weight last year through a simple regimen of walking, biking and dieting. He emerged nine months later still 5-foot-6 but weighing only 157 pounds.

"It's phenomenal," he said. "I feel completely different. I have more energy, I'm happier, I sleep better and my days are longer."

The rest of the borough, particularly residents in the south Bronx, would do well to mimic Dr. Rodríguez or at least attend the classes he offers at the Health Center at Tremont at 1826 Arthur Ave.

More people are overweight in the Bronx than in any other borough, according to a report by the city health department. With doctors drawing direct links between obesity

and diabetes, it isn't surprising that the Department of Health found that city's highest percentage of diabetics live in the Bronx. At more than 13 percent, the rate of people diagnosed with diabetes is 50 percent higher than the city average.

Concerned with the numbers, Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión will make the obesity and diabetes epidemic part of his State of the Borough address on Feb. 26.

"The figures show we have a great deal to accomplish in terms of educating residents," Carrión said. Carrión met with the Health Commissioner, Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, last Monday to ask what the health department will do to help.

Frieden said that a combination of moderate exercise and a healthy diet reduces the risk of developing diabetes by 56 percent.

Other outpatient clinics that advise adults and children on nutrition and healthy living include the Jacobi Medical Center and Montefiore Medical Center. Annette Williams

is a registered dietician who helps counsel children and parents on the virtues of eating good, simple meals instead of products whose main ingredient is battered and deep fried.

"Many people eat fast food," Williams said. "Often kids don't eat breakfast and lunch, which slows their metabolism down."

With the media spotlight on ephedra, an herbal stimulant that represses appetite and has been known to cause heart palpitations, Dr. Rodríguez cautions people to not become obsessed with quick fixes. The easiest first step is just that: walk. He recommends buying a pedometer, a small gadget that measures one's steps and that can be bought at drug stores. With a goal of 10,000 steps a day, he said "people start walking in the opposite direction to get the bus."

"What's much more important is the habit, not what's on the scale this week or the next," he said.