

Survey Says...

# We Need More Surveys

Help us discover the next breakthrough in obesity ...

For decades, TOPS members have been at the center of obesity research, helping our medical partners better understand causes, health risks and possible treatments for obesity. Our latest effort is the TOPS GENOME Registry, led by Dr. Michael Olivier and researchers at the Center for Precision Medicine at Wake Forest School of Medicine. They analyze saliva samples from volunteer TOPS members (and non-members) in an effort to unlock genetic trends. Like you, *TOPS News* had questions about this fascinating project, so we caught up with Dr. Olivier, who will be collecting samples and talking to members at IRD 2020 in Niagara Falls, New York.



**Dr. Olivier, lead facilitator of the TOPS GENOME Registry, invites members to help with his research.**

“My family has struggled with weight issues. I know firsthand how difficult it is.”

**Q Where are we in the TOPS GENOME Registry project now? How can members help?**

Since 2016, we have collected saliva samples from 474 participants—85 percent of whom are TOPS members. So far, we have collected samples from 48 U.S. states and eight Canadian provinces. (We are still looking for participants from Hawaii, Vermont, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan.) Our initial hope was to have at least 50–100 TOPS members—and a similar number of nonmembers—from each state and province.

Members can help with this research by participating in our TOPS



GENOME Registry study by filling out the online questionnaire on [www.topsgenome.org](http://www.topsgenome.org) and trying to convince family members, neighbors and friends to do the same. The only requirements for participation are to be over 18 years old and to have access to a computer, the internet and an email account. The more people who participate, the better we will be able to look at trends, causes and challenges to weight loss across North America as a whole—not just for residents of a particular state or province.

### What have you learned thus far?

We have learned a few things. We are looking at differences in DNA from 1) KOPS members who have maintained their target goal weight for 10 years or more, 2) TOPS members who have struggled with weight loss and 3) nonmembers who have not had any weight problems to date. While the analysis is still ongoing, this is the first step in trying to understand how our DNA influences weight loss.

Other things that we have learned are not very scientific. It has been fascinating to talk with participants at chapter meetings and larger TOPS events to learn more about members' challenges and life stories. And then, there is the painful realization that starting such a monu-

mental study just takes time—far more time than we had anticipated, even with such a motivated group of potential participants like TOPS members.

### What's your greatest hope for this project?


One hope is that our work can help explain—at least to a small degree—why we all struggle differently with weight loss and weight gain, and why some approaches work for some of us but not for others. Weight loss is not just a matter of willpower (as is often presented). Just because a specific diet worked for one person does not mean it will necessarily work for others.

My other hope is that the TOPS GENOME Registry will serve as a resource for several of the obesity researchers that we work with, and the participation in the registry will have a long-lasting impact on research related to obesity and weight loss.

### Why are you so personally interested in this topic?

My family has struggled with weight issues. As I have gotten older, I am also struggling to find the right way to maintain (or lose) my weight and live a healthy life. I know firsthand how difficult it is. Despite knowing a lot about the science of obesity and knowing what I should be doing, eating, etc., I struggle just like others do. So, I want to be able to do what I can as a scientist and researcher to provide useful, scientific data and information that can help all of us who struggle. I get really mad at the false promises I see every night in TV commercials for companies that sell expensive magic “solutions,” which lack actual scientific data and don't offer any real help. But I'm convinced that together, we really can make a difference!

To learn more and to participate in the TOPS® GENOME Registry survey, visit [www.topsgenome.org](http://www.topsgenome.org).

 You can participate in the TOPS GENOME Registry at IRD 2020. Dr. Olivier will be collecting samples and talking to members in Niagara Falls. Taking part in this survey can lead to the next breakthrough in obesity research!