

Our Children's Nutrition and Health

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Obesity rates in the U.S. are significantly on the rise. Based on the 2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey information, 15% of children age six to nineteen are overweight and this number has tripled since the 1970's. Health problems such as hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes which used to be only associated with adults who were obese are now being seen in our pediatric population.



How did we get to this crisis point? There are certainly a number of factors which have contributed to this current problem seen in our children. As parents, health care providers, educators, and food manufacturers it is our responsibility to begin to take action in order to reverse the continued staggering rise of overweight children and teens in this country.

Inactivity has certainly played a major role in fattening up our kids. According to the National Transportation Board, children walk and bike less to school than they did in the 1970's inside the home, there are more sedentary activities such as computer games and choices for television channeling than ever before. Physical education time at schools has become less as demands for academics have become more stringent.

Another contributor to our overweight kids is the high fat and refined sugars we feed them. The busy lifestyles of many families prevent them from cooking home-cooked meals and therefore, fast foods and processed "quick fix" dinner items have become staples at the dinner table...that's if the family is not eating in the car on the way to a sporting event or a meeting. Even when families do cook at home, many of the foods used are highly processed and contain sugar, fat and minimal nutrients.

Our schools are now oftentimes filled with vending machines loaded with soda pop, candy, and cakes laced with trans fats. Advertising campaigns targeting young children as they associate fast foods with toys are just another way to get our kids to desire unhealthy foods.

The challenge is to step up to the plate and take responsibility on many levels. Parents need to be educated in order to improve the nutrition and lifestyles of their children. Rewards such as ice-cream and pizza can be switched up for items such as mini-golf and bowling with friends. Instead of the family sitting around and eating cookies, why not have the family go on a morning hike and have fruit salad when they get back. School vending machines can stock fresh fruit and yogurt as quickly as they can cupcakes and hot dogs. There needs to be more interactive computer play such as the WEI where kids can get exercise as they play the computer and there needs to be more affordable ways for all children to have access to such games.

Clearly, if we are to make a difference in our children's health, there needs to be a collaborative effort on many levels. All children deserve the right to grow up to be healthy and thriving adults.

