

Childhood obesity-are the parents to blame? essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



According to recent federal findings, the number of American children from the ages of six to eleven has tripled in the last forty-years, with one in every seven of these children meeting the criteria for obesity (Better Nutrition 28). Children, like the rest of Americans, are living more and more sedentary life styles. Childhood obesity in school-aged children is rising, and it's the responsibility of the parents to prevent this from happening to their own children.

Much more than an aesthetic issue, childhood obesity is a major health problem. Today, one in five school-age children fulfill the medical definition of obese, weighing 25% more than the ideal for his or her height and age (Spake 40). In the last decade, the incidence of obesity among children ages 6-11 has doubled, and in adolescents it has tripled (Spake 40). A growing wave of obesity among children is helping to fuel a parallel epidemic in the rate of diabetes, especially Type II diabetes, the so-called non-insulin-dependent diabetes (Childhood Obesity). This is a dangerous disease that once struck mostly at middle age. How much of this will a parent ignore before the consequences become real? Diabetes is not the only issue; overweight children may also have greater difficulty with high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, orthopedic problems, heart disease, stroke, sleeping habits, as well as having low self-esteem, and problems with peer relationships (Childhood Obesity). All of these are symptoms that can carry over into their adult lives if left untreated. There is no single cause of obesity, but parents need to be aware of signs this growing problem in their own family.

There are several theories to try to explain or to just shift the blame for the problem. Some children don't get the exercise they need daily, some children are heavy simply because of genetic factors, and also many children are not getting the proper nutritional meals that they need to be healthy. Years ago, kids used to go outside and play after school or hop on their bikes and ride around the neighborhood until it was time for dinner. However, the increase of two-income households has left kids stranded in after-school and extended day-care programs (T. L. 84). Sports used to be the ultimate school-time activity with a vast range of events to participate in. But now, parents aren't comfortable with unsupervised outdoor activity and indoor activities are becoming more prevalent (T. L. 84). The choice is easier to make because doing those indoor activities take less effort than doing something outside.

First came television, followed by cable and digital hi-def. Video games evolved from Pong to Tomb Raider. Finally came the Internet and the IM monster. Now children sit and click (T. L. 84). As a result, we have a generation of kids who spend their time watching television, playing video games and surfing the Internet. The trance-like state associated with these activities slows down their metabolism so much that it's as if they aren't doing anything at all. The slower metabolism certainly won't help burn the excessive calories likely to have been in the child's dinner.

Families no longer eat regular meals together, and home cooking is no longer the primary source of meals for many people. Mom's baked potato has been replaced by a super-sized order of fries cooked in beef fat. Greasy

and sugar-laden fast food is cheap, tasty, and available everywhere, which only increases the temptation for parents and children alike. Many parents are exhausted once they arrive home after working and have a hungry child to feed. The temptation to run to a fast-food restaurant for dinner is often too powerful to resist. “ They make it so easy for you to ‘biggie size’ everything,” says Kelly Brownell, director of the Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders (Spake 40). Once a routine of fast-food eating is set, it’s hard to break.

Not all obese infants become obese children, and not all obese children become obese adults. However, in recent years, newborn babies are considerably larger, both in length and in weight than in the past. This is mostly due to heredity: today’s parents are getting taller and bigger than earlier generations (Scelfo 51). The babies’ growing is off the charts. “ It’s a tidal wave,” declares Naomi Neufeld, a pediatric endocrinologist in Los Angeles (Scelfo 51). Unfortunately, this trend can be directly related to the rise in overweight parents who are having these babies. As long as the child grows with his or her weight in proportion to his or her height, all is good. But problems arise when parents ignore that their quickly growing child is exceeding proportions. When the child begins school and is still considerably larger than the neighborhood kids, the parents may simply state that “ He was born big,” or is just “ big boned.” Excuses certainly don’t do them as good in the long run, as some exercise and a good role model would.

For those wanting to find an excuse for the growing number of children who are obese, these contributing factors provide one. However, many experts

believe that the real problem stems ultimately from the home, more directly, from the parents or guardians of these children (Better Nutrition 28).” We are the example set for our children from whom they learn their values ... We are the ones they watch intently. If the parent ignores the child’s weight problem from the start and does nothing, then the parents are to blame” (Better Nutrition 28). If a child learns that three to four helpings of dinner and dessert are the norm, they will comfortably fall into the pattern themselves (Better Nutrition, 2002). However, the ramifications can be deadly.

There are many things parents can do to help stop this potentially deadly cycle. Change begins at home. It doesn’t take that much longer to prepare a healthier meal at home or even a bagged lunch for the child to take. Some meals can even be started in the morning and left to cook while the family is away. Balanced diets with moderate caloric restriction, especially reduced dietary fat, have been used successfully in treating obesity. In addition, there is considerable evidence that childhood eating and exercise habits are more easily modified than adult habits (Childhood Obesity). By choosing healthier snacks for themselves and their children between meals, parents teach their children about portion control.

Families need to get in the habit of regular exercise, even if it is only to walk around a couple of blocks. Some other ideas are: sports, playing games with neighboring children, playing with pets, or even giving the child chores outdoors to do. Adopting a formal exercise program, or simply becoming more active, is valuable to burn fat, increase energy expenditure, and

maintain weight loss (Childhood Obesity). There are many after-school activities that parents can enroll their children in; this would also help balance out time spent in front of the television.

Due to this growing epidemic, even schools are combating childhood obesity, by taking out those pesky vending machines, and putting an emphasis on physical education classes. Ninety-two percent of the 500 teachers surveyed and 91 percent of 600 parents with at least one child in public school believe school vending machines should instead sell healthful foods and beverages. So now they are putting their ideas into action. While other schools may cut out PE classes due to budget, many are making it a priority with the rise in obesity ratings. For example, Babcock Middle School, in Westerly, Rhode Island, modified vending machine content “ by giving all vendors strict calorie and fat limits,” says school nurse Michelle Lacoï. “ Coke machines once supported the sports booster program, now there’s water instead.” Any kind of change will make it better for the kids and make their lives longer and healthier.

Obesity is easier to prevent than to treat, and prevention focuses in large measure on parent education. Education should include proper nutrition, selection of low-fat snacks, good exercise/activity habits, and monitoring of television viewing. In cases where preventive measures cannot totally overcome the influence of hereditary factors, parent education should focus on building self-esteem and address psychological issues (Childhood Obesity). Parents should look at their own eating habits to see what examples they are providing for their children. Healthy eating habits start at

home. The easiest place to make changes is with snacks. Trade in sugary snacks for air-popped popcorn and fresh fruit. Soda should be replaced with water and minimally sweetened juice and cereals should be high in fiber and low in sweeteners.

Although there are influences on a child's weight gain that may not be totally controllable, there is always a way to counteract them. And it is up to the parents to begin this routine before it is too difficult or just too late. With the life-threatening and health-hindering side effects related to obesity, why would any parent want to take that chance?