

OVERWEIGHT KIDS MEAN SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS AS ADULTS

by Fran Fisher

We all keep hearing about it, and seeing articles about kids being overweight these days. You can't even call them "fat kids" anymore, or pleasantly plump, overweight or obese. It's frightening the size we are seeing on some kids lately, and the teen obesity problem is reaching a serious epidemic! So, how can parents keep their kids from becoming overweight?

Being overweight is not good, and especially when it comes to children. Kids think it is OK and even cool to be overweight, but it's a major contributor to health problems that will catch up with that child when he/she reaches adulthood. Size does matter and bigger isn't always better. There are severe long-term bad health effects associated with being overweight such as diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and an increased chance of developing colon cancer.

Won't they just grow out of it?

If you allow your kids to continue to get bigger, you'll be endangering their lives. There is nothing good about being overweight, out of shape and unhealthy. Your overweight child will probably end up becoming an overweight adult if you don't do something about it now. It's not going to go away naturally like they think it will.

The question shouldn't be "what can you do to keep your kid from becoming overweight"; the question should be "what can you do to help your kid exercise"? And the answer is "lead by example".

Right now, Body Sculpting is promoting its Healthy Kids program by offering 50% off course fees for kids attending exercise class with their parents. Our Body Sculpting exercise class is a great way to get in shape and stay in shape... for life! It builds strong bones and muscles which is the foundation of good health. Studies show that kids that exercise regularly get better grades, have better concentration powers, are generally more alert and don't get sick as often, plus they have more self-confidence — and that stays with them throughout their life.

Parents can influence their child in a positive way by setting a good example. For instance, when I came home from school, my friend down the street and I used to either jump rope or ride our bikes until it was time to eat dinner. When we started the sixth grade, we began running sprints together and we competed in Junior Olympics. We didn't have computers or computer games when I was growing up, and even if we did, my parents would not have allowed me to vegetate in front of the boob tube (however, she had the first color TV).

My parents were great examples of healthy adults. My dad lived to be almost 90 years old and he exercised every day of his life.

On the weekends, my dad played Frisbee with me. Since we had an acre property, the goal was to situate ourselves further and further apart so that the toss became longer and longer each time. To this day, I still play Frisbee and it's a great full body workout.

What I would like to see more of is parents exercising with their kids. There's a lady in the development that takes her two kids for a long walk three nights a week. That's commendable! This allows for long mother-daughter talks... so crucial to growing kids and at a time when they need their parents the most. Walking together allows parents to have "quiet time" with their kids so they can hear what's on their child's mind. A lot comes out when you're exercising. It can sometimes be like truth serum.

Not only does walking offer bonding time with your child, but you'll positively influence your child by instilling good exercise habits at an early age that will stay with them for life. If they see mom and dad caring about their health, they will, too. My advice to parents: "lead by example".

Do something that's FUN so it doesn't "seem" like exercise, and keep it moving. A basketball game with your son or daughter will teach them good sporting skills that they'll use throughout their lives. Yard work and housework are excellent forms of exercise and should be counted as such. This includes cleaning and organizing the garage, picking up twigs in the yard, raking leaves and even vacuuming.

My mom used to play a game with me where she would have me pick up and put away 50 things around the house, and whomever got done first was the winner. This included putting away toys, picking up clothes from the floor, putting away groceries, throwing newspapers out, taking out the garbage and even emptying the dishwasher. She made it seem like fun even though it was still considered exercise (and plus the house looked great afterwards!). Exercise is fun this way because you don't even realize you're doing it.

The other night, I was at my favorite sushi bar and my husband and I sat at the bar and watched a child eating dinner with his parents. The parents finished their meals within 10 minutes, but their son continued to eat, and eat and eat. He must have ordered food three times and the parents just sat there, watched him eat and didn't say or do anything. When parents just allow this to happen, they send a message to the child that the behavior is perfectly acceptable. (I never saw a 14-year-old boss around a sushi chef like that before – "get me this, get me that...." – oy!)

If you think your kids are going overboard, "pull back the food" and do the old diet trick, "wait ten minutes". And remember, "limit portions". It's hard to tell if your kid is slated to become the next Otto Graham football player and he needs those extra calories because he's building muscle and growing, or if he's actually developing an "eating disorder" and just loves to eat and eat.

If you don't want your kids to eat donuts, cake, cookies, candy, pizza or pop, then don't buy them. It's better to have these types of foods out of sight which means they will be out of mind. Instead suggest healthy food alternatives such as edamame (soybeans), nuts, legumes, brown rice, yogurt, and other lowfat snacks. This is the "snack wisely" principle.

So, how do you tell your kid "you're looking a little porky, sonny?" Sometimes it's better to have it come from someone else rather than you. An unbiased opinion made by a doctor telling your child that he or she is overweight may have more of an impact than if it comes from you. We recommend that parents take their children to their family physician and have the physician determine your child's height to weight ratio and see if they are out of range. If they are, now is the time to start doing something about it.

Once your doctor has set your child's weight ranges, the doctor should also suggest that your child start an exercise program which will help to increase the present activity level of your child. The equation is simple: if you want to lose weight, you have to be taking in less calories than your body needs to function. You can increase the weight loss process by revving up your metabolism and burning more calories. The way to do that is through exercise.

What can parents do to help?

Try to "get kids moving at least 20 minutes a day" instead of letting them sit in front of a computer or plop down on the couch and start watching TV. There are way too many computer games that are being used to entertain kids these days. They serve two purposes: they keep kids busy and out of mom's way, and moms know where the kids are at all times. However, game rules should be enforced and a cutoff time should be established. I truly believe that parents that allow kids to play these games all day long are major contributors to the obesity problem. These games compel obsessive compulsive tendencies that may lead to addictive behavior disorders down the road. They are designed to encourage you to beat your best score.

After the cutoff point, play a game with your kid like my mom used to do with me. She'd say, "let's go outside and see how fast you can run to the back yard and back". And, she'd time me with the stop watch. This not only is a great way to get your kids to exercise, they may even try to really impress you and eventually may "take up a sport".

Is there any special program that addresses teen obesity?

A great way to get your kids interested in exercise is to visit some of northeast Ohio's Recreation and Community Centers like Middleburg Heights' and Beachwood's. Some centers are offering non-resident family memberships with full swim and gym privileges at very affordable rates.

Body Sculpting will offer its Teen-Fit exercise program at Middleburg Heights Community Center, 16000 E. Bagley Road, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 5:00-6:00 PM starting September 14. This is a one hour strength training class that teaches kids how to work out with weights. Kids ages 8-18 are welcome, and the cost is \$35 for eight classes. For more information, visit flexcity.com, or call 216-313-FLEX.

If you want to be proud of your kids, lead by example and start to exercise with them. Afterall, exercise is the secret to a long and healthy life!