

Parent

pages



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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When 'Baby Fat' Loses the 'Cute'

Pudgy cheeks and roly-poly thighs are what we like to see on babies. A little extra fat means they are thriving and growing. Pudgy cheeks are not what we want to see on our school-age children. It may be an indication of not enough activity.

We have an obesity problem in the United States, and our children are not exempt. Our nation has recently seen a

Certainly, God loves our children, no matter what they weigh. However, taking care of our bodies is how we thank Him for the way He cares for us.

54 percent increase in childhood obesity. The rate for children ages 6-11 has tripled. Not surprisingly we have also seen a marked increase in respiratory ailments, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnea, liver/gallbladder diseases, joint problems, early puberty, and depression in our children as well.

These children are being set up for an unhealthy adulthood. It's more than just extra weight, it is a lifestyle issue.

Many reasons for weight gain

There are many possible causes for the increased incidence of childhood obesity. More than likely, it is a com-

bination of factors. Family schedules have been the victim of negative influences over the years. Families spend more time in the car and less time outside. Fast food restaurants beckon to us from nearly every corner and our busy schedules make them an attractive option.

Our food tends to be high in fat and calories and the commercials, on the television we watch too much of, encourage us to buy foods that are less than healthy. The devil and the world work against our health. We have to take a pro-active stance to change this trend.

Experts have many recommendations for the treatment and prevention of childhood obesity. Families are encouraged to develop good eating and activity habits rather than subject a child to a weight loss diet. We can modify our children's behavior by helping them to create good habits.

Monkey see, monkey do

Of course, *we need to model these good habits.* We can establish some



healthy family rules like eating only in the kitchen, limiting time spent sitting in front of a screen, and stopping ourselves from rewarding or comforting children with food. We can also make sure children have enough time to eat slowly, which will allow them to know when they are full, and make sure they are getting enough physical activity at school or child care.

As parents, we need to manage our family routine so that we create a healthier lifestyle for our children. Visit the Shape Up America Web site listed at the end of this newsletter and find out if your child is at risk. If so, make a doctor appointment to assess your child's

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health and solicit support from your child's doctor in making healthy lifestyle changes.

Even if your children are not overweight, consider some of the suggestions below to help keep your family healthy. Adding more walking or stair climbing has a double benefit. Not only will you increase activity level, but you will help your child look for ways to be more physical rather than ways to keep from moving. Keep in mind that for most children, a weight loss diet is not recommended. Instead, it is better to work toward a healthy diet and an active lifestyle.

Small Step Approach to Improving Family Health

Childhood weight issues can be treated and prevented by taking small steps. Commit to one suggestion and follow it for one month. At the end of each month, add a new commitment to those that have become healthy habits.

By the end of the year, you will be doing 12 things to help you walk a "mile" toward a healthier lifestyle for you and your family.

Small Steps:

- Eliminate drinks with sugar or corn syrup. Be sure you read labels, as many juice drinks contain large amounts of corn syrup. Replace these drinks with water.
- Eliminate one hour of screen time a day. Screen time includes not only television but also computer and hand-held games.
- Buy an exercise bike and ask your children to earn screen time with exercise. Remove televisions from the bedroom.
- Exercise once a day. Add in easy activities like playing at the park, bike riding, trampoline, catch, etc.
- Eat only in the kitchen—not

in bedrooms, family rooms, or vehicles.

- Play the "Park in a Land Far Away" game. Make it a game to find the parking spot that is furthest away.
- Play the "Climb Every Mountain" game. Use the stairs whenever possible. Imagine what you may find at the top of the mountain or count the stairs to see which set of stairs breaks the previous record.
- Eliminate high-fat snacks and reduce the number of fast food meals.
- Change to a low-sugar cereal.
- Increase raw fruits and vegetables in the diet.
- Eat meals as a family and include devotions. A 30-minute meal will encourage slower eating and help children be aware when they are full. Including devotions makes it family time and not just a meal.
- Stop rewarding or comforting children with food.
- Keep an exercise and food journal and set goals as a family.

God would be pleased!

Giving our children a better future by helping them learn healthy habits is an important parental responsibility. It is more than just a lifestyle issue—it's a

spiritual issue as well. We practice good stewardship when we take care of the bodies God gave us.

We are also in better shape to do the work He sets before us. Certainly, God loves our children, no matter what they weigh. However, taking care of our bodies is how we thank Him for the way He cares for us. God will bless these efforts because He wants what is best for His children.



For discussion

1. What are your goals for your children for a healthy life in adulthood? How can you attain those goals for your children?
2. What stands in the way of healthy eating at your house? What stands in the way of increased activity?
3. What are you already doing that helps your children develop healthy habits?
4. How does family schedule affect family weight and activity levels? If your family reduced its "busyness," would that increase your activity?

For further study:

- A childhood obesity assessment calculator can be found at www.shapeup.org/oap/entry.php
- A physical activity assessment can be found at www.healthyeatingclub.org/your-health/phys-act/default.php
- Everything from kid's newsletters to recipes and activities can be found at www.grandmashealthykidsclub.com
- For articles on childhood obesity issues, go to www.mayoclinic.com
- To see what your government is doing, go to www.surgeongeneral.gov

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