Stand Up to Childhood Obesity, says Family Fitness Expert

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childhood obesity

Healthy Eating for Your Family in a Time of Stress-filled Excess

By Darrah Le Montre, staff writer

LOS ANGELES CA (RPRN) 04/24/09 -- Childhood obesity is a preventable epidemic. However, this costly problem is one that afflicts families across the nation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "16 percent of children (over 9 million) 6-19 years old are overweight or obese -- a number that has tripled since 1980. In addition to the 16 percent of children and teens ages 6 to 19 who were overweight in 1999-2002, another 15 percent were considered at risk of becoming overweight."

Celia Kibler, childhood obesity expert and founder of **Funfit**, award-winning family fitness centers across America, says, “Parents are the strongest role models.” Kibler encourages parents to start with themselves, reminding them that “children don’t go food shopping and prepare meals.” Simply put, Kibler says, “Children do what you do!”

The United States Department of Health and Human Services claims, “Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight or obese adults. This increases to 80 percent if one or more parent is overweight or obese.”

This far-reaching problem that spans socio-economic and ethnic divisions affecting children is not one that begs blame, but one that needs to change. So, parents, take heed, you have more control than you think you do. Having the discipline to say no to your children when they desire fat-filled, unhealthy snacks, like chips and cookies, is key to preventing bad habits that can lead to being overweight. But, large portions of unhealthy food or constant snacking on poor choice foods is only one issue at hand.

Recess, sometimes the only time for outdoor activity children experience, has been cut by 50% in many schools and entirely in others across the nation. This provides another hurdle for parents relying on schools to help their kids remain healthy and trim. But, don’t fret. After school activities like rollerblading, weekly gymnastics or dance classes, team soccer or swimming can change the damaging results of these budget cuts. Routines are great for kids and carpools can be set up to help working parents.

Exercise is also essential for parents. While this issue can be a daunting one for those who are working around the clock to resist the stranglehold of a depressing economy, don’t forget, you are your children’s role model. Kibler notes to parents, “children learn what they live. Children do what you do.” Thus, taking the steps to improve your well-being and implement a workable routine, will not only change patterns of unhealthy habits for you, but will encourage your children to forge a good path for the rest of their lives.

So, what are kids eating when you’re not around? According to the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, "nearly one-third of U.S. Children aged 4 to 19 eat fast food every day, resulting in approximately six extra pounds per year, per child. Fast food consumption has increased fivefold

among children since 1970."

How are children suffering? The Institute of Medicine doles out the research that “children born in the United States in 2000, the lifetime risk of being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives is estimated to be about 30 percent for boys and 40 percent for girls.” Add to that cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol and high blood pressure and you’re dancing with your children at the edge of a volcano.

The first steps to take to eliminate imbalances from your life, such as smoking, a sedentary lifestyle and poor food choices can be small, but have a big affect on you and your children.

1) Take a short daily walk
2) Have healthy snacks already cut up in the fridge, like fresh fruits and veggies
3) Keep your work area at home clean
4) Don’t eat for comfort!
5) Spend time outdoors
6) Spend 15 minutes a day in a peaceful setting

The benefits of these simple steps can be infinite. "Eating healthy and exercising," Kibler informs, “reduces stress, makes you feel better, and allows you to be more mentally and physically productive, encouraging learning.”

Imagine how much better your child will feel too.

Especially for women, gardening is an enjoyable outdoor activity that assists in the prevention of Osteoporosis because “it’s a weight-bearing exercise,” Kibler says. The direct sunlight also provides much needed Vitamin D, which helps with depression and assists in the absorption of calcium. Not to mention “the sense of accomplishment” that Kibler notes is a catalyst for her to want to hoe the rows in her own backyard.

“Take control of your whims and urges,” Kibler advises, mentioning that reaching for an alcoholic drink during stressful times, only compounds the problem. The sugar and carbohydrates in most mixed drinks rival a large dessert from T.G.I.Fridays.

And reaching for a candy bar? Bad idea. “Then not only do you feel bad about not having as much money as you wish you did,” Kibler warns, but you have the additional burden of guilt “that you just ate junk food."

Eating for comfort is in her words, “a guilty pleasure” that “everybody does, even a little,” but children raised with that role model will only mirror it later in life. Or now.

So, what *can* you do? The steps provided above are a great start. Also consider cooking with your children and taking them food shopping with you. This provides the landscape for early learning about nutrition, and children will be more open to trying new and healthy foods and will discover what is in their favorite dishes.

While books like “Deceptively Delicious” assist in cramming vegetables like squash and carrots into your kids more palatable sides, like mashed potatoes, it can also hurt them because then they don’t know what they are eating, and won’t reach for it when you aren’t around.

“Consistency is key,” Kibler accesses. “When they can of themselves make those decisions without you, we will turn around childhood obesity as a trend.”

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