



Connect with Kids

WebSource

For the Classroom

The Junk Food Trap

Video Overview

For many families, mealtime in the fast-food lane is an all too familiar scene. "It's there. It's easy. It tastes good," says Terri Gavulic, a busy mother of 7-year-old Zelli. "You say, well, I'm going to get the salad, and you know you finish your daughter's french fries. It's just too easy."

The new research shows that when parents eat fruits and vegetables, their kids are 16 times more likely to do the same. When parents drink soda, their kids are 40 times more likely to drink soda. It seems parents are food role models.

"When Mom and Dad eat poorly, they certainly cannot expect that the child will eat well," says Beth Passehl, director of FIT KIDS, a health and fitness program for children coordinated through Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

"I finally realized, I'm not being a good role model for my daughter if I'm eating unhealthy. If I'm saying to exercise, but I'm not," says Terri Gavulic.

Through the years, the Gavulic family has made positive health and fitness changes in their lives. Zelli is enrolled in the FIT KIDS program where she's learning why it's important to make good choices. "I may have health problems when I grow up if I don't start exercising and eating healthy," she explains. So eating right and exercising has become a family affair.

Experts say parents need to establish a healthy diet for themselves and then get children to adopt the same diet.

"We're the ones that really are setting the stage, and we're the ones that are in charge," says Passehl. "It's not the children who are in charge." Finally, she says, remember that whatever choices you make, your kids are watching and learning.

Culture of Obesity

In the past 30 years, childhood obesity has doubled for children between the ages of 2 and 5 and tripled for 6- to-11-year-olds. More than 15 percent of children between 6 and 19 are considered obese. Countering that trend, child advocates say, will require nothing less than a multi-pronged national effort.

Today, less than 6 percent of high schools require juniors and seniors to take physical education. There is also an "enormous decrease" in the number of school playgrounds. And recess has

Evidence-Based Multimedia Resources www.connectwithkids.com

disappeared in many elementary schools where principals, anxious about preparing students for high-stakes standardized tests, have deemed it "nonproductive."

Efforts are under way to reinstate physical education. Recommendations include a minimum of 150 minutes a week for elementary school students and 225 minutes for high school students.

The Council of Educational Facility Planners International dropped its recommendations calling for vast acreage for large school sites, which will give school districts more flexibility in locating schools on smaller sites in places accessible by walking and biking.

By one estimate, 65 percent of students walked to school 30 years ago. Today only 10 percent do.

What Parents Need to Know

For more than 14 million children, accounting for 25 percent of students between kindergarten and 12th grade, no parent is home after school. The child must take care of himself or herself. Many receive strict instructions from parents: Lock the door and don't go outside. It's a recipe for inactivity and an opportunity to snack. Only 11 percent of students (6.5 million) attend after-school programs, where they are likely to get a nutritious snack and take part in fitness activities.

The reasons for childhood obesity are complex and cannot be pigeonholed in a single or few causes.

Among the reasons experts cite are:

- Kids' backpacks are too heavy for walking to school.
- Children rely on school buses or family vehicles for daily transportation.
- Parents are concerned for kids' safety and no longer permit outside, unsupervised play.
- More homework allows less time for play.
- Many schools have stopped scheduling recess.
- Toy vehicles of today are not kid-powered, but battery-powered.
- Computer games stimulate sports, rather than kids actually playing the sport.
- Kids often eat due to stress or boredom.

Although cafeteria menus are coming under fire, the problem goes beyond what children eat to include when they eat. Crowded schools must extend lunch hours to serve everyone. An early lunch hour may come when the kids aren't hungry, they may not eat a healthy meal, and then they'll snack later. With a late lunch hour, kids might snack first and not be hungry for a good lunch. Finally, students also have limited time to eat. We're trying to get them to eat healthier food, but that takes time to chew.