

Childhood Obesity

IN THE LATE 1970S , ONE IN 18 KIDS WAS OVERWEIGHT. NOW, ONE IN THREE KIDS IS OVERWEIGHT! WHO'S AT FAULT? FROM WHAT WE SEE AT CAMP JUMP START, THERE IS PLENTY OF BLAME TO GO AROUND—FOOD AND BEVERAGE MARKETERS, FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS AND YES, EVEN WELL MEANING ADULTS. BUT FOR SURE, IT IS NOT THE CHILD'S FAULT!

When people ask me who I blame for this Childhood Obesity epidemic--I tell them:

“I don't blame anybody. I blame EVERYbody!”

Many parents send their children to Camp Jump Start so that we can “fix” their overweight or obese child. I tell them this overweight child is the lucky one because this child gets the warning sign that something in their life is not working for them. The entire family's lifestyle is not working for them and those life choices are affecting everyone in their family. At camp we re-frame the family condition so that parents understand the skinny kids are no healthier than the overweight child. Parents learn that it is not a punishment for the skinny children to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Most of our families live such fast-paced lives these days. They run from one thing to another and have lost focus on some important aspects of family life. We, as a society, have to slow down; we move too fast. We must examine our true priorities and what is important in life then take control of our schedules. It is time to shore up our foundation and that means going back to the basics.

Food is one of these essential basics. To survive we need to nourish ourselves. But with what? It is all so confusing!

Pediatrics, the professional medical journal for the Academy of Pediatrics, published an article in 2004 based on a study of the dietary intake from 6,212 kids and teens living across the United States. They found, not surprisingly, children who ate fast food consumed more calories, more fat, more added sugars which included consuming a large amount of sugar sweetened drinks. These children took in less fiber, less fruits and less vegetables. The children who ate fast food received close to an additional 200 calories per day compared to kids who did not eat fast food. Those 200 calories translate into an extra 6 pounds per year for those children eating fast food.

In most fast foods, the nutrients are taken out and concentrated calories are what is left. The body does not recognize this “fake food” as food so one can eat an enormous amount because the body keeps searching for nutrients. These “unnatural” foods---there are no chicken nuggets in nature---artificially concentrate into highly addictive substances. These substances are sugar, salt or fat and if you combine all three then it easily becomes THE drug of choice for so many. This fake food works like a drug and stimulates those pleasure centers in our brain making us crave more and more. And this is why so many parents

are finding food wrappers hidden under the child's bed. Your child has a food addiction! And that child whether skinny or fat needs help.

So what can you do to end this cycle? What we teach our kids and families at Camp Jump Start is to begin by finding those “baby steps” you are willing to make as a family. Baby steps will make a difference. A few suggestions are:

1. Your drink of choice is water. Serve only water with meals. You can infuse the water with slices of cucumber, strawberry, lemon or lime to make it more interesting.
2. Avoid items with high fructose corn syrup by learning to read labels.
3. Eat out only once every two weeks—this means you have to plan ahead to prepare meals and include the entire family in the process. Even the youngest child can play a part. After all, this is a family affair! You must see obesity as the enemy and you have to fight this condition together as a family in order to win the battle!



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