Do You Have a Fat Kid? Whose Problem is It?

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Pediatricians are sounding the alarm about the weights of our children. They say our kids are at danger of becoming really sick if the trend toward obesity is not reversed soon. What's going on? Why have the past 30 years shown such an increase in childhood obesity? The answer is not always clear-cut but there are several factors that are known to play a part in childhood and adult obesity:

1. It's about time! We are all in scheduling overload. Unfortunately, this includes our kids. The unhappy result of "too little time" is that we are eating out more than ever before. While a night out can become a special time for family bonding, it is most often seemingly the only solution if the family is going to eat tonight. And, what's so bad about eating out?

Mainly two facts:

-First: Restaurant foods are usually high in salt, sugar, fat, and calories. (Because it "tastes" good).

-Second: Portions are way out of control. Eating establishments are competing with each other by portion size. We're eating two, or even three, times the amount of food we need and our kids are doing the same thing. Just because it's there!

2.Sitting down! We're doing too much of that! Sedentary lifestyles are becoming a way of life. We probably sit too much at work, and if we don't, we sit too much at home. Yes, we're tired at the end of the day but lack of exercise is probably contributing as much to our fatigue as our day's activities. The problem is made worse by the fact that we are in a habit of munching while we sit. This is often "mindless eating"...that is, we are eating not because we are hungry, but because...well, because....that's just what we do! One example: do you eat popcorn and candy at the movies, while, watching the movie?

It's a habit and a bad one because it compounds the problem of exercising too little. We're adding calories to an already overweight body.

3. Thanks Uncle Jake! Heredity does indeed play a role in our tendency toward obesity. While we do not directly inherit fat cells, we do inherit bone structure, the way we metabolize foods, and our basic body make-up. And, to make matters worse, being overweight often has to do with the kind of dietary habits we grew up with. Obese adults are often the children of obese parents. Many people simply do not understand that there is a right way to eat, and a wrong way to eat. We do second, or even third, helpings because that's what we've always done.

4. Knowledge is power! We need to learn to read labels on food items...especially with regard to calories, fat, and portion size. (We may "accidentally" eat 600 calories by not realizing that this cookie is intended by the manufacturer to feed 2 or 3 people.) Nutritionists tell us to fill half of our plates with fruits and vegetables, one fourth with protein (chicken, meat, tuna, beans), and the other fourth with grains, especially whole grains. We need to cut out second portions and obvious sugar (candy and non-diet drinks).

Frequent consumption of extra calories consumed over a five minute period of time can lead to a lifetime of misery...diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, some kinds of cancer, high blood pressure. It's not worth the risk, folks.

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