

## PKD HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES FOR ALL AGES

Visit the PDK website — [www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org) — to order online or call 1-800-766-1156 for more information.

### Books

Youth Suicide: The School's Role in Prevention and Response

Adolescent Sleep Needs and School Starting Times

Psychology of Success

### Fastbacks

Short publications for educators that also may be informative for parents.

#421 Tobacco Interventions

#460 Helping the Grieving Child in School

#461 HIV Education: Perspectives and Practices

#495 Project CLEAN: Safe, Sanitary School Restrooms

#517 Helping Students with Diabetes Management

#520 Understanding Students with Asperger's Syndrome



### JOIN PDK

Parents and other concerned community members are invited to join as PDK associates, a new membership category designed to serve noneducators. For more information, contact Membership Director Billie Spellman at 1-800-766-1156. Her e-mail address is [bspellman@pdkintl.org](mailto:bspellman@pdkintl.org)

## PARENT PAGE

### Combating Childhood Obesity

The medical community calls childhood obesity a national epidemic. How bad is it? From 1971 to 1974 among children ages 6 to 11, 4.3% of boys and 3.6% of girls were considered to be obese. By 1999-2000 the percentages had risen to 16% of boys and 14.6% of girls.

Obesity is defined as being at or above the 95th percentile of body mass index (BMI), which is a BMI of 30 in adults. This is the BMI associated with elevated blood pressure and is a criterion for more aggressive treatment of overweight. Children at or above the 85th percentile (associated with an adult BMI of 25) are “overweight.” About 30% of children ages 6 to 11 are overweight. The statistics do not improve for adolescents.

### The Risks

Being overweight or obese can bring a host of problems. The prevalence of asthma is significantly higher among overweight children and adolescents when compared to their peer group. Type 2 diabetes has increased over the years in parallel with increasing overweight. High blood pressure (hypertension) occurs about nine times more often among obese children than among non-obese children. Other risks include orthopedic complications from the extra weight on growing bones and cartilage, negative body image, and increased likelihood of sleep apnea (absence of breathing).

### What Schools Can Do

With all of the pressure from pundits and politicians to “improve student achievement,” increasing seat time for academics has led some elementary schools to reduce or eliminate recess time. The opposite is needed, according to the National Association for Sports and Physical Education, which recently doubled its recommendation for daily activity from 30 minutes to one

hour. The group recommends that children be physically active in 15-minute intervals throughout the day.

The American Academy of Pediatrics chimed in on the obesity issue by urging schools to ban soft drinks and limit access to fatty foods. Some school cafeterias have responded by cutting out such foods as super-size cheeseburgers in favor of low-fat burritos and salads. But there are some caveats. Some “healthy” alternatives are anything but. For example, fatty dressings on salads can load up the calories. And schools that replace soda with juice or sports drinks may only be cutting out fizz. A *Wall Street Journal* article (13 Jan. 2004, D1) compared a 12-ounce Pepsi to the same size Snapple Raspberry. The Pepsi contained 150 calories and 40.5 grams of sugar; the Snapple Raspberry 150 calories and 37.5 grams of sugar. Some sports drinks and juices actually contain more calories than soft drinks.

### What Parents Can Do

Diet and exercise are key. Children whose schools offer only limited physical activities need time daily to be more active. That means shutting off the television and the computer to go biking, swimming, and shooting hoops. Active young people are more likely to be active adults, which will lead to better lifelong health.

Helping children learn to reach for an apple instead of a bag of chips can be a first step toward more consciously healthy eating habits. Gradually adopting such habits and sticking to them are better in the long run than binge diets, which can bring yo-yo cycles of weight loss and regain — usually accompanied by feelings of failure.

Steps must be taken at home *and* at school in order to turn around the statistics on childhood obesity. *Need more information? Go to the American Obesity Association website at [www.obesity.org](http://www.obesity.org).*



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