

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



What we're doing about childhood obesity

By Juliet Zavon

"It's all that junk food."

"People don't get enough exercise."

"Eating healthy foods is expensive."

Everyone has an opinion about what causes obesity, but experience shows that it's not so straightforward.

Weight gain occurs when a person consumes more calories than they use up in physical activity, but this uncomplicated equation is deceptively simple. "Childhood obesity is a complex issue that can be addressed at an individual level through personal eating and activity habits, but it also needs to be addressed at the broader community level because factors such as access to food, safe neighborhoods and health care are all part of the problem", said Lauren Niemes, Director of the Nutrition Council of Greater Cincinnati.

In the past 30 years the percentage of obese children under 12 has more than doubled. Each year poor diet and lack of physical activity contribute to an estimated 400,000 deaths, and healthcare costs related to obesity exceed \$100 billion. It is predicted that diet and inactivity will overtake tobacco as the leading cause of death in the future.

Physical activity

National statistics tell the story, but the problem becomes more personal when we look at factors in our own community that contribute to obesity. Many Cincinnati neighborhoods don't have safe places for children to play outdoors, and budget constraints have reduced physical activity in schools. Many elementary school students have gym only once a week. Schools are not funded or evaluated based on the physical fitness of students.

Limited Access

"Many of Cincinnati's low-income neighborhoods like Millvale and Lower Price Hill have limited access to healthy food choices but have plenty of poor choices", Niemes said. Aldi's in Avondale closed and the survival of Kroger's in Walnut Hills is uncertain. Yet, all these neighborhoods have corner stores selling snack foods and fast-food restaurants are plentiful.

"People want to find someone to blame", Niemes continued, "but it's not so simple." Grocery stores that can't cover their costs cannot be expected to stay in business, and corner stores would stock more fruit if people would buy it.

Cincinnati created financial incentives to persuade Saks department store to locate downtown so why not do the same for grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods? Philadelphia has done it. Cincinnati uses many financial tools to shape private business in our community. What will it take for the city to use these tools to promote business and community development that produce a tangible step in combating the obesity epidemic?

The Nutrition Council in action

A multi-faceted problem like obesity has many potential points of intervention as illustrated by several Nutrition Council programs.

Parent education. Cooking at home can be healthier and less expensive than eating out. The Nutrition Council teaches parents of young children to make tasty, affordable skillet suppers as a part of our work with early childhood programs. Dinner for four at McDonalds can cost \$18-20 while the total cost of Quick Skillet Lasagna (7 servings) is \$6.00. Giving parents hands-on experience with healthy eating on a budget is an important lesson in health and financial literacy.



Our Family Meals classes are a part of a larger initiative providing training and resources to day-care providers, early childhood education programs, and parents.

Nutrition in the schools. The Nutrition Council worked with students and Food Service in the Norwood Public Schools to increase the quantity and variety of healthy foods available in schools. Students participated in taste testing, nutrition research, and marketing. They were the target consumer and supplied critical input to Food Service.

Students designed a publicity campaign to highlight the importance of milk as a highly nutritious beverage that is a better choice than sugary beverages. The project combined the learning experience of a science project with the challenge of public communications and consumer marketing. It increased milk sales in the cafeteria by 90%.

Community leadership. The Nutrition Council leads The Collaborative to Prevent Childhood

Obesity. This coalition includes Hamilton County Public Health, American Heart Association, Children’s Hospital Medical Center, the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati Health Department, and more than 20 other organizations. Implementing the strategies and actions recommended by the Collaborative will engage families, schools, health-care providers, the media and others in long-term programs aimed at reversing the alarming increase in childhood obesity.

Where do we go from here?

Marketing, media, public policy, cultural norms, parents, schools, and communities are all part of the problem, but, said Niemes, “Obesity is no one person’s fault. It’s everyone’s responsibility”. “We want all children in our community to develop eating and activity habits that help them lead healthy lives. That’s important for their future and our community’s future. We’re working towards that goal.”

Quick Skillet Lasagna

Makes 7 servings-1 cup each

Ingredients:

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ pound lean ground beef
- 1 can (14.5-ounces) Italian-style diced tomatoes
- 1 can (6-ounces) tomato paste

- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 3 cups uncooked noodles
- ¾ cup low fat cottage cheese
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese

Instructions:

1. Heat oil in a frying pan that has a lid. After about 1 minute on medium heat, add onions and ground beef. Cook until beef is brown and onion is tender. Drain off excess fat.
2. Add tomato paste and cook with ground beef and onions for about 3 minutes.
3. Add tomatoes, water and garlic powder to the beef mixture. Bring to a boil and simmer without the lid for about 10 minutes.
4. Add uncooked noodles to mixture. Put the lid on the pan and continue to simmer until noodles are cooked and sauce is thick. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking.
5. In a separate bowl, mix cheeses together. Drop by spoonfuls into the frying pan on top of the tomato and noodle mixture. Put the lid on again and heat for about 5 more minutes.

Nutrition information per 1 cup: 180 calories, 15 grams protein, 4.5 grams fat, 21 grams carbohydrate, 100 milligrams calcium, 490 milligrams sodium.

Serve with a salad, whole grain bread and fruit for a complete meal.



Help Children Eat Well, Move More and Be Smart with The Flying Pig

It is easier to help children get in the habit of keeping fit when exercising is fun. The “Flying Pig Kid’s Marathon” is a great activity for children ages 5-12. The Nutrition Council partners with the Flying Pig Marathon to organize this kid-friendly program. Children can walk, run, or wheelchair 1-3 miles a week over a 10-week period to complete the distance of a marathon (26.2 miles) incrementally. They also get to practice good eating habits and are encouraged.

They can finish their marathon on May 2nd, the day before the running of the Flying Pig Marathon. For the final mile, children follow the course of the Flying Pig Marathon and cross the finish line to receive a marathon medal, t-shirt, and other treats. Children share in the excitement of the Flying Pig Marathon and are exposed to athletes and runners whose enthusiasm for this sport is contagious.

For more information about how to get your children involved with the Kid’s Marathon visit the Flying Pig’s website www.flyingpigmarathon.com or contact Robin Penderly at robin@nutritioncouncil.org

More Nutritious, Still Delicious

Cookbooks are always written by people who love food and love to cook, but the authors of the Nutrition Council’s cook book More Nutritious and Still Delicious can boast of something extra. They are also registered dieticians! This means that they can combine their love of cuisine with a health professional’s knowledge of nutrition, and the results are spectacular—not only good for you but delicious, inexpensive, and quick and easy to prepare. This book includes recipes for old favorites such as meat loaf as well as more exotic fare like French Lentil Salad. Recipes include calories per serving, complete nutrition information (protein, sodium, etc.), and tips that will help you use recommended nutrition guidelines for good health.

Support the Nutrition Council, and treat yourself and a friend to a copy of this book.

Cost: \$20.00 (\$25.00 if shipping is required):

- Order on-line at the Nutrition Council’s website www.nutritioncouncil.org
- Purchase a copy at our office (2400 Reading Road, suite 201-B, Cincinnati, OH 45202)
- Also available at Joseph Beth Booksellers and Findlay Market at the Market Center, next to Eckerlin’s and opposite Silverglade’s.)

The 10K Carrot Run is coming again!

Save the date! Join us for our 8th annual “Strides of March” Carrot 10K and 5K Run/Walk on Saturday 9:00 a.m., March 7, 2009, at Lunken Playfield. The Carrot has become a favorite with runners in training for marathons, but many walkers and joggers also join in the fun.

- Participants get a custom-designed T-shirt featuring a unique carrot motif.
- Hot soup is available at the finish line. Homemade and plenty of it, each year it’s a different soup made from a recipe in the Nutrition Council’s cook book More Nutritious and Still Delicious, which you can purchase. (See announcement about Holiday Gifts in this issue.)
- The Nutrition Council distributes carrot recipes (soups, salads, baked goods, and more)

Registration fees support the Nutrition Council and its work with the Collaborative to Prevent Childhood Obesity and the Cincinnati Nutrition Network for the First Five, a program that provides training and resources to parents of young children and childcare staff so they can help children establish healthy eating habits and physical activity patterns early in life.

Visit our website at www.nutritioncouncil.org for more information about Strides of March 2009 Carrot 10K and 5K.

Healthy & Fit Families—Good Health Starts at Home

The most important part of raising healthy children is to commit to a healthy and active lifestyle everyday. Making healthy choices doesn't have to cost a lot or take a lot of time. Here are some simple things you can do to help your children be healthy and fit.

Stop the pop! Make healthy drink choices.

Most kids today are getting too many calories from sugary drinks like regular soda pop, fruit drinks, Kool-aid® and sports drinks. The healthiest drink choices are water, fat-free milk, 1% milk (for children aged 2 and older), or 100% fruit juice (limit to 8-12 ounces a day). Serve sugary drinks as a special treat, not an everyday choice.

Eat more fruits and vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet and most kids don't get enough of them. All forms count—fresh, frozen, canned and dried. Be sure to include at least one fruit or vegetable at every meal and snack to reach the goal of 5-9 servings at day.

Be active everyday with your children.

Children need to get at least 1 hour of physical activity everyday for a strong and healthy body—adults need 30 minutes—so why not be active together? Make time for fun family activities like taking walks, tossing a ball, shooting hoops, jumping rope or dancing in the living room. Visit one of the many local parks, playgrounds or recreation centers. You can squeeze in 10 minutes of activity lots of different ways and it all adds up to more energy, better health and feeling good.

Move away from the screen—TV, video games and computer!

Children who spend more than 2 hours a day in front of a screen are more likely to be overweight and less likely to do well in school. Strengthen your child's body and mind by setting limits on screen time (no more than 2 hours) and doing something together as a family—play a game, read, eat dinner together or take a walk and talk.



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Our Mission

To promote healthy environments and lifestyles through nutrition education, physical activity and advocacy.



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