

What To Do About Fat Kids

By ACSH Staff — June 7, 2004

It's amazing how many people feel comfortable blaming the food industry for the obesity epidemic in the United States. Less surprising is that having blamed industry, people seek to regulate what types of food can be marketed toward children. But refusal to take personal responsibility for eating misleads us into thinking that Americans are fat *because of junk food*. It also perpetuates the nonsensical claim that food can be separated into two categories: good and bad.

In truth, there is no bad food...only bad diets. And this, combined with a serious lack of physical activity in an ever more convenience-oriented country, is why Americans are fat. Technically, one could eat as much as one wished and lose weight, provided one burned more calories than one consumed. This is true regardless of the calorie source, be it a Snickers or a salad. (As ACSH's nutrition director, Dr. Ruth Kava, [describes](#) ^[1], Chazz Weaver and Soso Whaley both lost weight by eating nothing but items from the McDonald's menu, including chocolate shakes and Double Quarter Pounders, for an entire month while getting regular exercise. And Chazz consumed a daily average of 4000 calories! These results were in sharp contrast to those achieved by filmmaker Morgan Spurlock at the completion of his month-long McDiet. He gained twenty-five pounds by eating like a glutton while getting no more exercise than the average American.)

For many of us and, sadly, for our children too, calorie input far exceeds calorie output. As Kava points out, "any calorically-dense foods, eaten to excess, can add inches to one's girth, especially if unaccompanied by calorie-burning exercise; that should be the real message not that cheeseburgers and fries, (or carbohydrate or fat) automatically make one fat!" (See http://www.acsh.org/news/newsID.175/news_detail.asp ^[2].) The Federal Trade Commission's chairman, Timothy Muris, seems to agree, given his June 3rd statement that "banning junk-food ads aimed at children is not the answer to today's obesity epidemic" (see http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=594&e=1&u=/nm/20040604/hl_nm/health_obesity_ads ^[3]).

According to a recent *Time* magazine article, 25% of American cats and dogs are fat too, and it can't be from viewing too many Pop-Tart commercials. Should the government spend its time and money banning the advertisement of foods flagged as unhealthy? Or would a more effective and realistic approach be to address the nation's obesity issue by emphasizing the importance of eating a balanced diet in combination with regular exercise? For the record, one in four Americans get little or no daily exercise, and only one in five engage in a high level of overall physical activity (see <http://my.webmd.com/content/article/64/72508.htm?lastselectedguid={5FE84E90-BC77-4056-A91C-9531713CA348> ^[4]).

What we have lost track of in America is what it means to have a healthful lifestyle. And while it might seem a quick fix to ban the advertisement of so-called unhealthy food to children, and to

prevent such foods from being offered at all in schools, this merely amounts to hiding the ice cream at the back of the freezer. It becomes a big, bad, guilt-inducing indulgence that we wouldn't have to feel so badly about eating in the first place if we just took the stairs instead of the elevator, walked a few blocks instead of hopping a cab, or got out and moved around some more.

Still think commercials for junk-food are to blame for the expanding waistline of America's youth? I have a solution. Focus on getting them to turn off the television and take the dog for a long walk. And instead of a Playstation, get them a bike.

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