

Stopping the Childhood Obesity Epidemic

This summer, thousands of over-sized kids are attending summer camp—“fat camps” as they are somewhat derisively called—in hopes of losing weight that has been otherwise difficult to shed. While you read this, they are exercising, perhaps for the first time since toddlerhood; learning about nutrition and eating meals with portions that many would consider a light snack.

It's part of a reaction to a crisis both perceived and real. Young people, more than ever, are feeling the pressure to look trim and fit. But it is not just body-image issues that drive this trend. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980. And obesity, the CDC says, is clearly tied to numerous health problems such as hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and many others. But it is not just about fat kids. Lifelong eating habits are established in childhood according to the CDC. The result is that the U.S. is in a population-wide obesity crisis.

But the experts are at odds with each other over some aspects of weight control. When the U.S. Department of Agriculture released their new food pyramid in April, many critics cheered that, at last, better guidance was being given to consumers on making healthy food choices. Yet even the new pyramid which makes more recommendations about quantities of food, exercise, and allows for individual differences—among other things—has also been criticized as insufficient. "It's clear that we need to rebuild the pyramid from the ground up," says Walter Willett of Harvard, “not just tip it on its side and dress it up with new colors.”

Despite debate about specific guidelines for nutrition, most agree, losing weight is primarily about nutrition and adequate exercise. For children specifically, however, “the most successful obesity treatments,” says Dr. Henry Anhalt, director of the division of pediatric endocrinology and diabetes at the Saint Barnabas Medical Center in New Jersey, “involve the cooperation of the entire family.” It's a total lifestyle change.

Anhalt and his colleagues have been working on obesity solutions for children for years. And although his approach to weight control is multi-faceted, he says, “obesity is a matter of nutrition, not willpower.” According to published research by Anhalt and others, obese children lack important nutrients compared to regular-weight children. These include vitamins D, E, B-12, and Folic acid, among others. These findings have raised concerns about not only the health of obese children but also their ability to lose weight. A child that is not healthy, according to Anhalt—one that is not fully energetic and vital—cannot exercise sufficiently to burn calories. Overweight children, he says, need more than smaller food portions. They need specific nutritional intervention.

To address this problem, Anhalt and his colleagues developed a line of supplements, called *EssentialLean*, designed to provide the nutrients found missing in over-weight children. They are also on a mission to provide other research-based resources to parents

and others to help families bring about lasting lifestyle change that will solve the obesity dilemma. Some of their work can be seen at www.essentialean.com.