

Follow the Chisum Fitness Trail – Adolescents

RE: Adolescent Obesity

The number of children which are overweight has doubled the past 20 years. It is estimated that approximately 30% of all American adolescents currently reside within this category, or will the next few years. Schwimmer, Burwinkle & Varni (2003. JAMA) projected that one in every seven children are obese. The diagnoses of Type II diabetes in children has raised proportionally to the increased weight gain.

This year the Center for Disease Control and Prevention instituted a survey of 5,500 children throughout the United States. These adolescents ranged in age from 2 through 11. The mothers of one-third of the overweight kids perceived them as having the correct weight.

It was interesting to note that a majority of these children were males. It can be surmised that this is due to the social perception that girls must be thin to achieve their optimal goals and desires.

In a recent article by Bandini et al. (1999. Obes. Res.) a small number of obese (21) and non obese (22) children kept a 14 day dietary journal. In this study, the difference in caloric consumption from high dense, or junk foods, was non significant. It was theorized that the increase in the consumed calories were from the accumulation of all foods.

July 1, 2003, Betsy D. Holden, the CEO of Kraft Foods, and an ex 4th grade teacher, announced a global initiative aimed at reducing their caloric dense food products. In their media release, it was reported that this change was directly linked to the adolescent obese epidemic. This company distributes the following products into the global market; 1) Oscar Mayer meats, 2) Kraft cheese, 3) Nabisco cookies and crackers, 4) Philadelphia cream cheese, 5) Post cereals, 6) Milka Chocolates, etc.

Four key areas were addressed. They included the following; 1) product nutrition, 2) marketing practices, 3) consumer information, and 4) public advocacy and dialogue.

These four areas were broken down into the following sub fractions:

Product Nutrition

- A cap on the portion size of single serve packages
- Guidelines for the nutritional characteristics of all products
- A planned effort to improve existing products and provide alternative choices where appropriate.

Marketing Practices

- The elimination of all in school marketing

- Locally appropriate criteria to use with the vending industry in different regions of the world to determine the selection of Kraft products to be sold through in school vending machines
- Guidelines for all advertising and marketing practices including advertising and marketing to children to encourage appropriate eating behaviors and active lifestyles.

Consumer Information

- Nutritional labeling in all markets worldwide including markets where labeling is not required.
- Adding nutritional and or activity related information on product labels and company websites to assist consumer choices.
- Guidelines for the use of health related claims in all markets worldwide including markets where no restrictions exist.

Advocacy and Dialogue

- Advocacy for appropriate public policies to engage schools and communities in helping to improve fitness and nutrition.
- Increased dialogue with key stakeholders to help guide the company's continuing response to the obesity issue.

To accomplish this task, Kraft will commence an extensive program of evaluation and implementation. This will include assessment data on appropriate single serving sizes, caloric dense products, development of a comprehensive lifestyle choice program, produce a standard nutritional labeling agenda, provide a wider choice range for vending foods, etc. Their plan includes the creation of an 8 week health lifestyle course for Latino families. They also have earmarked \$2 million for the funding a healthy lifestyle website for children aged 9-12, and their parents.

Several aspects of this program have already commenced. Four cities within the United States are piloting the Latino family option. Since 1997, Kraft has dedicated over \$17 million to increase the amounts of fruits and vegetables through the Kraft Fresh Produce Initiative. This is part of an overall program to assist food banks to improve the nutritional quality of foods offered.

The Schwimmer, Burwinkle & Varni article noted a five fold additional risks concerning social adjustments and the development of a positive feeling of self worth. Their research indicates a significantly lower health related Quality of Life (QOL) scores in all domains, had similar scores as those peers which were diagnosed with cancers, had a greater potential of have impaired health related QOL measures, and much more difficulties with sleep apnea than lower body fat adolescents.

The authors also noted an inverse relationship between fatness and the psychosocial functioning. The areas of concern were consistent within the following three abilities: social, psychosocial, and physical.

Within their conclusions, they support intervention with these children to offset the potential risks. Here is the direct quote, “Physicians, parents, and teachers need to be informed of the risks for impaired health-related QOL among obese children and adolescents to target interventions that could enhance health outcomes.”

Yanovski & Yanovski (2003. JAMA) provided an overview of the limited long term data on weight loss programs in overweight or obese children. Behavior modification intervention is a vital aspect of adult weight management, but has not been proven with the same results in adolescents. They suggest a more aggressive approach using pharmacological therapeutic options.

Berkowitz et al. (2003. JAMA) researched the difference when treating 82 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years with either behavior therapy (BT) and a placebo, or Sibutramine and BT. The results indicate a significant increase in weight loss with a concomitant reduction in hunger, in those using Sibutramine and BT.

Sibutramine is an anorexiatic medication which maintains an elevated level of norepinephrine and serotonin. The adverse effects of this drug include increases in heart rate and blood pressure. Clinical monitoring of these two physiological functions is paramount in decreasing any long term adverse effects.

In Conclusion: The increase in obesity and overweight children has reached epidemic proportions. Most of the research is conducted into weight management options for those adolescents which already demonstrate this condition.

During the past two decades, quality physical education has been almost eliminated from most elementary school curricula, and the number of television viewing hours has increased significantly. This combination plus the noted increase in total caloric consumption provide an easy answer as to the cause.

It is ultimately important to address this issue prior to the child becoming overweight. This statement is supported by Schwimmer, Burwinkle & Varni, and Yanovski & Yanovski. It is also a focus within the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance advocacy statements.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

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