

Tackling Childhood Obesity A Family Affair, Says Expert

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(PhysOrg.com) -- "We are at a crossroads, where the unfortunate reality is that the current generation of children is more likely to pre-decease their parents because of the development of early onset obesity and inactivity-related diseases, such as type II diabetes," said Betsy Keller, professor of exercise and sport sciences at Ithaca College.

Keller explained that the greatest risk for [childhood obesity](#) is an obese parent. Typically, [children](#) with obese parents learn and practice family eating and lifestyle behaviors that contribute to the development of obesity, instilling such behaviors early in life.

“Children of obese parents are themselves 13 times more likely to be obese; it is critical to effectively change the tide of what has become the norm in too many U. S. families. The solution is not simple, but efforts to regain healthful levels of [body fat](#) in children are more successful and long lasting than in adults. For that reason, First Lady Michelle Obama’s call to focus on children’s health is important and urgent,” said Keller.

Studies show the percentage of overweight children, pre-teens and teenagers has increased between 5 and 19 percent from the mid-1970s to the present.

“We now have more than one generation in which obesity has been highly prevalent. We have a generation whose parents, and perhaps even grandparents, are likely to be obese, and may very well have only obese family members as a frame of reference for body size,” she said.

According to Keller preventing obesity in children is far easier than treating obesity. To successfully reverse the obesity trend the entire family must embrace the treatment program with regular and sufficient levels of physical activity coupled with a [healthy diet](#) and calorie count.

“More than 70 percent of parents incorrectly think their kids get enough physical activity. So it’s likely that your kid may not be getting enough physical activity either,” said Keller.

Keller cites recent research reported in the journal Pediatrics, which states that a good way to start tackling this problem in young children is a three prong approach: 1) limit “screen” time to 2 hours per day; 2) eat the evening meal as a family most days of the week, 3) make sure your young child gets at least 10.5 hours/night of sleep. Being a role model for healthy eating and [physical activity](#) behaviors will impress your child of any age, and have long-lasting, healthful benefits for all.

A fellow in the American College of Sports Medicine and the author of numerous journal articles on sport medicine and physical fitness, Keller examines the relationship between physical inactivity and the development of [obesity](#) in children and the effects of chronic fatigue syndrome on physical function.

Provided by Ithaca College

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