

## THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

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Remember being 10-years-old and running like the wind after your dog who was thrashing your sweatshirt from his drooling mouth? Could you catch him just as easily today? Could your child or the child down the street?

Maybe not...since 1980, the number of overweight children in the U.S. has tripled to 9 million. Similarly to adults, children with weight problems can have elevated blood pressure and cholesterol, joint problems, Type II diabetes, gallbladder disease, and asthma. Severely overweight and obese children can suffer from depression, anxiety disorders, isolate from their peers, and develop eating disorders.

Not so easy to catch a dog when you struggle with any of the above...

Let's see what recent studies reveal about kids' eating habits:

- 2% eat recommended servings from all five major food groups daily
- 30% get enough milk
- 80% eat more than 30% of total calories from fat, the recommended limit
- 98% eat three snacks per day, more than 50% report five or more

Let's see what research shows about kids' activity:

- 6% of school children have daily physical education classes
- 25% get the recommended 30 minutes of physical activity daily
- 50% don't participate in vigorous activity on a regular basis
- 75% of waking hours are inactive – lots of television, video games, computers

Let's see how experts suggest we can help children flip those numbers around and catch that dog:

- Rather than "dieting" (which has been shown to be ineffective and possibly dangerous with children), make better food choices – <http://www.mypyramid.gov/index.html>
- Teach the "energy balance" concept – the calories consumed in food (energy in) should equal the calories spent in being alive and active (energy out) – with integrated classroom lessons and active examples in health, science, and math, 'balancing' food intake with physical activity
- Move/Play/Participate – Walk or ride a bike to and from school or to a friend's house; develop safe neighborhoods for after-school activities; it's not all about organized sports...lots of fitness options out there

Some youth and families may need more structured help. For successful, long-term weight loss there are wonderful options, like Shapedown Pediatric Obesity Program, [www.shapedown.com](http://www.shapedown.com). I am happy to be a part of a team of experts, along with Marcy Fiacco, RD, and Lorrie Golden, LCSW, holding our first local 10-week intervention program for adolescents the winter of 2007. University-based and research-driven, SHAPEDOWN has provided safe, effective care to more than one million families over 25 years. We will use a family therapy model to address underlying psychosocial dimensions related to each adolescent's weight issues. Through problem-solving, improved intra-family communication and parenting skills, the family dynamic can change to support a healthier life style. Using a cognitive approach and teaching stress management techniques to the participants can help the youth change their over-reliance on food and find the joy in being active. If you are interested in learning more about our program, visit the following website: [www.healthstylesnutrition.com](http://www.healthstylesnutrition.com)

\*Statistics and figures from this article were derived from multiple sources: National Institute for Health Care Management; The U.S. Surgeon General's report (1996); [www.ActionforHealthyKids.org](http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org).