

AUGUST 2009

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**PILATES &
PREGNANCY**

MEAT:
*Organic Vs.
Conventional...*

**ELECTROMAGNETIC
POLLUTION**

Elizabeth Vaughan, MD

**TREATING
ADHD
NATURALLY**
KATHI KEMPER, MD

*The Lowdown on
Food Allergies*

Your Resource For a Healthy, Active, Sustainable Lifestyle...Naturally

A Weighty Issue:



Best in The Country Is Not Good Enough?

Recently the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) reported their findings from an in depth study of Americans and their weight. The study, *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies Are Failing in America 2009*, indicates two-thirds of Americans are either overweight or obese, and obesity rates for children are at or above 30 percent in 60 percent of the states.

According to this study Minnesota ranks 31st for adult obesity in the nation, at 25.3 percent. Mississippi had the highest rate of adult obesity at 32.5 percent. Colorado had the lowest percentage of obese adults at 18.9 percent.

Minnesota children ages 10-17, on the other hand, have the lowest rate (tied with Utah) of being overweight in the country at 23.1 percent. Mississippi also had the highest rate of obese and overweight children (ages 10 to 17) at 44.4 percent.

Ranking best in the country is great, but still nearly one in four youth are overweight or obese! Compared with many other countries this statistic is alarming. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) current obesity levels range from below 5% in China, Japan and many African nations. In some Chinese cities however the rate is as high as 20%. Even the highest region in China is still well below ours in Minnesota. That said, merely a century ago the United States had nearly equivalent rates to the lowest in the world today.

Ironically there is a complete turnabout in the reasons for why so many other countries have lower weight than we do. For example the TFAH study cited generally higher incomes in Minnesota as a decisive factor for us having fewer overweight children. Wherein China and other countries cited by the

WHO, the exact opposite is true. The more wealth in certain areas and cities the more likely both children and adults will be overweight.

How does this make sense? Simple. In China people with wealth eat a diet with a lot of meat and fat which is much closer to ours and they gain weight. People with low sources of income eat a plant-based diet with little meat, almost no dairy, and very little fat. These meals have a lower density of calories. A serving of rice and beans weighing the same as a fast food meal delivers 1/4 the calories. Meanwhile the meal has the same effect upon feeling full. The young people burn off the calories they consume. They have nothing leftover to convert to fat and remain trim and slim.

In the U.S. healthy meals cost more than junk food, thus wealthier people tend to be slimmer. American children generally eat meals that have more calories within a given meal than their Chinese counterpart. And our kids have far more snack food, soda, energy drinks and other high sugar and calorie foods at their fingertips. The calories not burned in typical day-to-day activity are converted to long-term storage on the body as fat.

The study also indicated our youth have a lower rate of obesity because Minnesota children (and adults) are generally better educated than other states. Better education leads to a better understanding of what types of food are good for the body. It also helps people better decipher misleading ads and understand nutrition labels on packaged food. This promotes wiser food choices and an ensuing lower rate of obesity.

A Growing Trend - Factors Adversely Influencing Weight and Activity of our Youth.

As recently as 1980, the U.S. national average for adult obesity was 15%. Today a whopping two-thirds or 60 percent of all American adults are either obese or overweight. Childhood obesity rates have also tripled since 1980. There are numerous factors in the battle of the bulge for our kids. The following are several significant contributors to these excessive gains.

1. Family Meals – Far fewer families are together with two adults. Even fewer have sit down family meals together. Grabbing convenient food and stepping out the door happens more often than a prepared and balanced meal. Children are eating more quickly and less variety of foods. Compounding that with the high calorie choices in front of our kids makes the effect of losing the family meal more dramatic.

2. 24/7 Television Programming- Most adults remember when Saturday morning was a special time for kids. Cartoons were on TV! Some kids were lucky enough to relax for an hour or two and watch them. Other than Saturday morning cartoons and a handful of shows, sparse programming was available specifically for kids. With the advent of cable and entire stations/networks dedicated to children's programming, children are lured to sit in front of the TV for hours on end. Watching TV burns an equivalent amount of calories as sleeping.

3. Video Games and Computers - Children today have many choices when it comes to video games. There is a game for any type of activity imaginable. Generations ago, children played baseball, basketball, football, and rode their skateboard. Now they can turn on a video game and do the same thing while only exercising their finger muscles. Further, video games have been shown to have addictive qualities. When a child begins to play they often cannot stop. Kids often snack while playing this activity that burns no measurable calories. The internet also yields motionless kids staring at a screen for hours on end.

4. Target Marketing – Television programming is inundated with ads for heavily sugared cereals, sodas, energy drinks, pizza, ice cream and high calorie snack foods. Celebrity athletes and other forms of trendy advertising pitch fast food to our youth in an unending and influential barrage. Purveyors of nutritious foods such as spinach or broccoli simply can't compete.

5. Movies/DVD/s - Movies have become the babysitter of the 21st century. There is also a new movie coming out every time you turn around. Never before has such a high quantity and quality of sedentary material appropriate for

children been available. And nearly every household in America has a DVD player and movies. Children often choose to relax passively with a movie instead of being active.

6. School Funding – School is becoming another completely sedentary activity for children. Children of previous generations could look forward to consistent physical activity at school in gym class. Many had broader options for sports as well. Today gym class and after school sports are being cut at an unprecedented rate. Further, schools today have vending machines dispensing pop and candy. Schools rely on those profits to meet funding needs. Generations ago soda pop was banned or only allowed for special occasions. Today these fattening snacks and beverages are a part of daily life for many school kids. Also many large corporate industries such as the dairy industry provide educational materials for classroom activities. These promote the 'healthful benefits' of products such as cheese. In reality consumption of cheese is a direct contributor to many children being overweight.

Some Practical Solutions

A simple way to help a child lose weight is to increase the amount of plant based foods they eat. Any form of leafy green and green vegetable in general is a great source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants for a healthy body and mind. All whole fruits, vegetables and legumes should be encouraged. They are far less dense in calories and higher in nutrients than processed food. They also have been shown to dramatically reduce the risk of most cancers.

Also, get them to increase their physical activity. The American Council on Exercise (ACE) recommends children get a full 60 minutes of vigorous exercise every day. Children can participate in organized sports, weight lifting at home or in a gym (with supervision), and can ride their bikes at nearly any age. Limit the time your kids spend doing sedentary activities as well. Get them moving and soon you'll see a dramatic improvement in attitude, fitness and weight.

With 25% of Minnesota adults being obese and many more being overweight, perhaps the best thing you can do is lead by example. Make healthful choices for yourself. When you consistently eat well, exercise regularly and take care of yourself, your children will likely follow for life.

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