

Too Many Treats

By Debi Silber, MS, RD, WHC The Mojo Coach®

Do your kids constantly ask for treats? Does it seem like cookies and candy, juice boxes and fast food meals are all they're willing to eat? You're not alone- many kids are attracted to things that aren't the best nutritional choices. Maybe you are thinking, "They're kids, it can't be *THAT* bad for them."

Let me share some frightening statistics from the *International Journal of Pediatric Obesity* (a problem so large that it has its own Journal!)

- Childhood obesity is the greatest health risk our kids face today
- By the year it is expected that 50% of all children will be overweight
- This is the first generation where kids have a lower life expectancy than their parents

We're spending billions of dollars on healthcare and our kids are unhealthier than ever. What's going on here?

One thing that's going on is that the average American child's diet consists of one-third junk food. Snacks, candy and other prepackaged foods, desserts filled with fat and sugar make up a large portion of their daily intake. And I'm not just talking about special occasions like Halloween and Christmas. This is every day, all day.

The "food" that kids are eating is nutrient void but dense in calories and it's often the lowest quality calories that you can find. These are the choices that are placed at a child's eye level in the grocery store, and it's not by accident. Commercials promoting these high-sugar, high-fat, low-nutrition foods also air during your children's favorite TV shows. The commercials for these foods are filled with bright colors, music, action and the promise of something special.

An additional issue is that, as a nation, we are suffering from "portion distortion", and this includes our children. They are learning to super-size, and purchase "economy size" and "value sized" meals themselves. They are constantly being bombarded with unhealthy food choices and learning that "bigger is better." And then the problems of low-quality, high-volume eating are compounded by an increasingly sedentary lifestyle. Think back to when you were a kid. Chances are you played outside

with the neighborhood kids after school until it became dark. Kids today come home from school and many of them spend the rest of the afternoon and evening in front of a TV or computer screen. So here's a troubling equation for you:

Sedentary Lifestyle + High Fat/High Sugar Foods + Huge Portions = Overweight Kids

Now some kids have the opposite problem, instead of being sedentary, these kids have no downtime at all. They're being shuffled from one activity to the next day in and day out. What are they eating during all of this "shuffle time"? For many moms, the easiest solution is either grabbing fast food to eat on the run, or grabbing some snacks for the kids to eat in the car. See where I'm going here?

In our well-meaning attempts to give the best to our children, we push the limits until the only possible way to get everything done is to cut corners. These corners frequently impact the food choices we make (for ourselves and our kids) when our lives become hectic and out of control. So here's another equation for you:

**Overbooked Kids + Overstressed Moms + Convenience Foods =
Overweight/Overstressed Kids**

Take a look at how your lifestyle impacts your kids and see if it's contributing to the development of unhealthy habits. Consider making changes that make healthy choices and a sane lifestyle part of the plan for everyone in the family. From stocking the snack cabinet with healthy choices, to making a plan to sit down as a family for a real dinner on a regular basis, to planning activities that get you all away from the TV for a few hours, you can make sure your kids start off on the right foot building a healthy lifestyle.



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