

Childhood Obesity – Breaking the Chain

Young children do not understand that they are what they eat. I remember being young and feeling invincible to the elements of food. I also remember my parent's strict rules and regulations about what we ate and what we drank. McDonalds was a once in a great while treat and we never had soda pop unless it was a party or special occasion. Today's world for younger generations is just not the same and the majority of the responsibility has to fall on the parents. Kids are just open minds who fill in the gaps with what they hear and what they see. It is crucial that they get the best information from multiple resources. As a teacher and a coach I find myself talking to students and athletes more and more about what they put into their bodies. Parents need information to help guide the decisions of their children and this will be the focus of today's article.

According to the various medical professionals I spoke with prior to writing this article, children ages 2-19 should have total cholesterol of less than 170. Today many children are flying above that threshold and together as a group – medical professionals, teachers, parents, coaches and others working directly with youth, we need to help them break the chain and it starts with what they eat. If the saying does hold true that children are what they eat then they need to eat great and then they will be great and feel great. Here are some tips to be great by eating great to help our children:

- 1- Any kind of berry is good for children, but raspberries have the most fiber, with 8 grams per cup. The skins are also rich sources of fiber, which will keep kids full and satisfied longer — so don't peel them. Berries can be mixed into just about any kind of cereal and

they compliment most proteins. Apples are also excellent sources of vitamins and high in fiber. Apples eaten with peanut butter are excellent for kids because it offers a source of carbohydrates and proteins at the same time.

- 2- Go granola and oatmeal. These breakfast foods are excellent sources of carbohydrates and protein that can keep children fueled for long periods of time and they are easily accessible. Granola and oatmeal also have been linked to reduced cholesterol in children and adults. One of my personal favorites is Quaker granola and Kashi cereals and granola based products. Remember to add some fruit to your cereal to add some more kick to it.
- 3- The musical fruit – Beans. We all know the saying about beans in regards to the GI tract, but this wonderful little fruit is an excellent source of fiber and useable protein. They can be mixed in with most meat dishes and kids might not even know they are eating them. Baked beans, string beans, kidney beans and green beans are just a few types of beans.
- 4- Peanut butter – Most kids that know me well at school also know that I eat peanut butter like it is going out of style. I keep a container of it in my office at school and have a surplus of it at home in several places. Peanut butter when added to other foods is an excellent protein and omega 3 fatty acid source. It can reduce cholesterol, and helps prevent heart related conditions.
- 5- Get some soy in your children's diet. Soy is a power food when it comes to lowering cholesterol because soy products contain

something called isoflavones, which naturally reduce the bad cholesterol and reduce the risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

- 6- Go dark with chocolate vs. milk chocolate. When you offer your children a chocolate snack or dessert replace milk chocolate with darker chocolate. Dark chocolate is high in flavonoids and flavonoids help platelets from sticking together therefore reducing the risk factor for blood clots. In addition, studies show that it lowers the bad cholesterol by as much as 10 percent.
- 7- Stock up on the popcorn. That is one snack that I remember having almost once or twice per week as a child and my parents used to make it on the popper machine. Now it is as easy as plopping it into the microwave for 3 minutes or less and there she be – a healthy snack. Provided that you keep the butter and salt to a minimum, popcorn is an excellent snack.
- 8- Wheat pasta – I remember ordering a wheat pasta dish at one of our team dinners for powerlifting and the kids never even noticed they were eating wheat pasta vs. white pasta, they never said a word about it, they just smiled and ate like kings. Children will replace the white for the wheat and this is crucial that we as the adults see that children will conform to change provided that a rational is given and that we give them the nutritional facts. I still remember the time when I dumped white bread by the wayside and I will never go back to the starchy bleached flour in white bread ever again.

With knowledge and tools to help children, we can help them break free from the chains that are holding them back. They can learn to make healthy decisions and choices about what they eat from the role modeling of parents and the many other positive influences they encounter. We must ban together to give them better information than

the media throws at them to trick them into shortcuts. There are no shortcuts to healthy eating only good decisions and self discipline.

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