

# "The Quarantine Fifteen"

## Pandemic Weight Gain in Children and Teens

by Doug Puder, MD



Many parents have noticed they are eating more during this pandemic. It's easy to understand why: We are scared, we are staying home so much, we are watching way more TV and there is just much less to do. Many have put on a few pounds which some call "the quarantine 15".

It is no different for children or teenagers. Team sports and many activities have been postponed. Activities with friends are limited. Virtual school makes them look at a computer screen for hours and hours. And kids are scared too! We know obese children and teenagers are at risk for health risks including heart disease, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, diabetes, joint problems and liver disease. We get it and we understand the crazy challenges this pandemic is creating for our patients. How can we make healthy changes?

### **Be Proud Of Your Body!**

Overweight children and teenagers should be proud of their bodies no matter what they weigh! No-one should ever be shamed for what they weigh or feel bad about their body. Our wish to help our young patients achieve a healthy weight is only to prevent illness in the future. *Millenials, Generation Z, the iGeneration, and Pandemic kids* will benefit from so many advances in healthcare. But we don't want them to become *Generation XXL!* Obesity numbers have tripled since the 1970s. I hope they will not have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

### **Lifestyle Changes, Not Diets...**

Please do not put a child with a weight problem on a "diet". The real solution requires lifestyle changes for the whole family. Crash diets and fad diets don't work and are dangerous. Weight loss drugs are even more dangerous. We want to promote a healthy lifestyle, not an obsession with weight. Praise, love and cherish your child, and never tie acceptance to body size! Please don't compare an overweight child to siblings or other children. So what can parents do?

### **Set A Good Example!**

Children learn from their parents' example. It doesn't help to force a child to eat foods they don't like. But it does help them to see their parents eating healthy foods and healthy portions. If parents don't snack in front of the TV, their children are less likely to do it. Family mealtime is so important. When a family sits down for a meal together (with the TV off) good eating habits are created. But parents also need to model healthy eating habits. Put the fork down between bites to slow down the pace of eating! And exercise regularly. Show

**Eat as a family!**

**Have fun  
without food!**

**Exercise!**

**Don't skip meals  
or snacks**

**Don't forget  
breakfast**

We hope you find our Parentletter helpful and informative. Please keep in mind that receipt of this newsletter does not create a doctor/patient relationship and that it is not meant to serve as a substitute for professional medical advice. For particular pediatric medical concerns, including decisions about diagnoses, medications and other treatments, or if you have any questions after reading this newsletter, we encourage you to speak with your child's pediatrician.

your children that exercise is something you enjoy.

## **Exercise as a family is even better!**

Going for walks or hikes together, bicycling, or any physical activity will teach children that moving their bodies can be fun! Make daily chores a part of your exercise (park the car further away from the store and walk).

## **Exercise is not a punishment! Don't force...**

Let your child choose activities he or she enjoys. Try different types of exercise until your child finds something fun. Children should try lots of different activities. The best exercise is the one your child likes. Some like competitive sports, some do not. Keep exercise up every season. And change the routine so they don't get bored! There is nothing wrong with treadmills, for example, but most kids get bored quickly.

## **What About Food Centered Family Gatherings?**

Thanksgiving dinner, a 4th of July barbecue, a superbowl sunday party are examples of holidays centered around eating. We hope those bring your children wonderful memories. But make sure that there are wonderful memories of family exercise and activity also. Make sure your child's fondest childhood memories are not associated with eating and "just sitting!"

## **Please don't use food as a reward!**

Give a hug instead. This can lead to emotional eating as they get older.

## **No child should go hungry! Don't skip breakfast...**

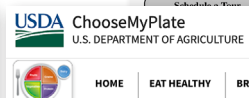
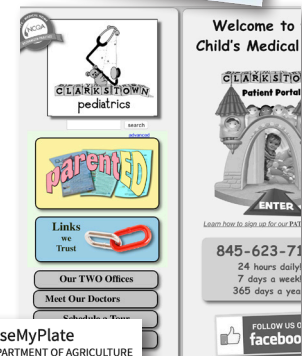
Please don't put your child on a strict calorie diet. Children and teens need three meals a day and scheduled snacks between meals. It's not just eating that makes us gain weight. It's what we eat, where we eat and drink, and portion size that really counts. Children who eat breakfast have more energy, do better in school, and eat healthier throughout the day. It's good habits that matter not diets.

## **We didn't even talk about what foods to eat!**

Sure, limit the amount of milk your child drinks and go for lower fat milks (2%, 1%, or skim). We don't like juice as it is just fancy sugar water. Aspartame (*NutraSweet, Equal*), Sucralose (*Splenda*), and Stevia are examples of safe and healthy choices if your child has a sweet tooth. Limit "junk food" and high calorie fast foods like pizza and chips. It's okay to have these as a treat but not too often. Find vegetables and fruits your child likes. Don't force them but let them know they can have these when they are hungry.

## **Go to the LINKS button on our homepage:**

There are many resources for you on our website for specific diet recommendations. There are articles in our ParentEd section, and links to:



**Clarkstown Parentletter** Douglas Puder MD,FAAP, Editor,Illustrator  
Gregg Rockower MD, FAAP • Erica Berg MD,FAAP • Jeffrey Karasik MD,FAAP,