

Obesity cuts U.S. children's life expectancy short

January 13 2011

For the first time in history, the next generation will not live longer than their parents.

“Diseases such as Type II diabetes, high blood pressure, heart conditions and joint deterioration - what were once considered ‘adult’ diseases - are regularly being diagnosed in children, due to the prevalence of [obesity](#),” said Jessica Bartfield, MD, internal medicine and medical weight-loss specialist at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital, part of the Loyola University Health System.

“What is particularly tragic is that studies have suggested that obesity in children today may contribute to a two- to five-year decline in their life expectancy, shorter than that of their parents, due to obesity-related diseases that are largely preventable,” said Dr. Bartfield, who is part of Gottlieb’s medically supervised weight-loss program involving physicians, nutritionists, exercise physiologists and behavioralists.

She said obesity has many causes, including environment and culture. Genetics and parental weight status also plays a role.

“If one parent is obese, a child has a 50 percent likelihood of being obese, and if both parents are obese, that skyrockets to 80 percent likelihood,” she said.

Research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 80 percent of obese children between the ages of 10-15 continue to be

obese at age 25. Furthermore, the earlier obesity develops in children, the more severe it tends to be as an adult.

Besides health implications, there are psychological and social effects as well.

“In addition to decreasing years of life, obesity decreases the quality of life through social ostracism, bullying, social isolation, and poor self-esteem, which can lead to poor performance in school, in jobs and in life,” she said.

Top Five Ways We Can Reverse the Obesity Trend

1 – Parents take charge. “Focus on getting the family healthy, not putting someone on a diet,” she said. “Monitor and take accountability for what the family is eating. Plan meals, set limits and take the team approach.”

2 – Involve the Kids. “As a family, create a weekly meal plan, look up calorie counts, make a grocery list, read product labels, choose fresh rather than packaged and get everyone’s participation,” Dr. Bartfield said. “Everyone has to get on board to be successful.”

3 – Add fresh fruits and vegetables. “Replace apple sauce for oil in baked goods, add carrots, broccoli and kale to soups and omelettes, cut up fresh fruit as a side dish,” Dr. Bartfield said. “Even if it is dipped in a little low-calorie whipped topping or low-calorie salad dressing to make the fruit or vegetable more appealing to kids.”

4 – Cut liquid calories. “Soda, flavored and full-fat milk, fruit punches and fruit -flavored beverages are loaded in sugar and empty calories,” Dr. Bartfield said. “Substitute 2 percent for whole milk, or skim for 2 percent, and try adding water, seltzer or club soda to juices to cut calories.”

5 – Prioritize breakfast and keep meals consistent. “Eating within the first hour of waking up powers the brain and jump-starts the metabolism for the rest of the day,” Dr. Bartfield said. “Choose protein and fiber in breakfast foods to boost endurance.” Establish set meal times, and calories per meal, and stick to them, with defined healthy options for snacking.

Keeping It Real

“In overweight children with medical complications or obese children, strive for a one-pound individual weight loss per month,” said Dr. Bartfield, who uses guidelines by the American Academy of Pediatrics. “Focus on weight maintenance for overweight kids without medical complications. As kids continue to grow in height, their percentage Body Mass Index (BMI) on the growth chart will decrease.”

Illinois Is At-Risk

Dr. Bartfield practices in Chicago, which has seen a rise in childhood obesity. “Most recently, data from the 2007 National Survey of Children’s Health found Illinois to have the 4th-highest rate of child obesity in the nation – 1 out of every 5 children is obese. In particular, our children entering schools in Chicago (age 3-7) have about double the rate of obesity as the national average of similar aged kids.”

Provided by Loyola University Health System

Citation: Obesity cuts U.S. children's life expectancy short (2011, January 13) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-01-obesity-children-life-short.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.