

# Convenience leads to corpulence

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Two of the biggest influences on children — parents and schools — may unintentionally contribute to childhood obesity. That's the observation of Susan Terwilliger, clinical associate professor in the Decker School of Nursing at Binghamton University, who studies the problem.

"As a pediatric nurse practitioner I've taken care of children and their families for about 30 years, and I saw this huge increase [in [childhood obesity](#)] from 5 to 30 percent over about a 10-year period when I was in the school-based health centers," she says.

In researching childhood [obesity](#), Terwilliger studied third-graders in four schools in Binghamton, NY. Some of the cold, hard facts may no longer surprise us: 70 percent of the children drank between two and five sweetened beverages a day; 85 percent watched between two and five hours of television a day; and 42 percent ate two or more fast-food meals per week.

But these numbers, all hallmarks of childhood obesity, can be the unintended consequences of rational decisions.

- Children who are told by parents to avoid water fountains because of germs may instead drink sweetened juices.
- Fear of potential danger can prompt parents to restrict children's play space to a backyard or inside the house.

- Schools sometimes trade gym class or recess for academics as they try to raise test scores.

Eating fast food on the way to soccer may seem like a tradeoff healthwise. But, Terwilliger points out: One of the reasons fast food fits into a hectic schedule is that processed food, with its high fat content, literally slips down easily. And the quicker and easier it is to eat, the more you may consume.

There is a lot of data that say today's kids won't live as long as their [parents](#), Terwilliger says.

"I now have 13-year-olds with type 2 diabetes." Heart attack is the number one cause of death and stroke the number three cause, and diabetes and hypertension, both caused by obesity, contribute to both, she adds.

Provided by Binghamton University

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