

Rules of thumb: Three simple ideas for overcoming childhood obesity

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Kristopher Kaliebe, MD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans School of Medicine, offers parents and caregivers three simple family-oriented goals to overcome the complex problem of childhood obesity and related mental disorders. They involve limit setting to address the brain's "get more" drive strengthened through habitual over-consumption of temptations including highly caloric processed food, hyper-reality media and electronics, as well as excessive sitting. His 3 "rules" of living promote physical and mental health for children and parents for both treatment and prevention. They are published in the April 2014 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

"The pediatric obesity crisis arose from systemic changes in society and multiple dynamic interacting risk factors," notes Dr. Kaliebe. "It has been paralleled by increased [mental health](#) problems that seem interrelated."

Childhood obesity correlates with attention-deficit /hyperactivity disorder, learning disorders, and academic underperformance as well as increased internalizing and externalizing disorders.

"Moreover, many behavior patterns associated with obesity, such as sedentary lifestyles, excessive media exposure, and inappropriate diets, also correlate with a psychiatric diagnosis or psychological distress," says Dr. Kaliebe.

His "rules," meant to facilitate healthy choices, are straightforward and practical.

1. Eat Food – Not too Much, Mostly Plants. Dr. Kaliebe explains that eating natural, unprocessed, raw food eliminates the constant need to calculate calories, carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, etc. – a reason diets fail. This rule also advises severely restricting foods like chips, sodas and fast food.

2. Get Up and Move. Noting that humans are not built to sit for much of the day, Dr. Kaliebe says children as well as parents need to find excuses to move whenever possible and be especially active during leisure time.

3. Honor Silence. Dr. Kaliebe says sensory overload and "noise" from popular culture, gaming, advertising, media and electronics crowds out important things such as family matters, academics, sleep, and the development of other interests. "Habits have profound effects," concludes Dr. Kaliebe. "Celebrations, such as birthday parties, are less meaningful. Don't stress over the occasional special treat, but be strict about everyday routines."

Provided by Louisiana State University

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