

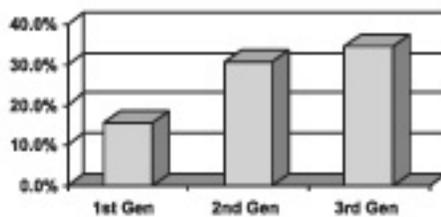
OUR KIDS AT RISK:

Obesity in Asian American & Pacific Islander Youth

Children in the United States are more obese than ever. The popularity of TV, videogames, and Internet usage in combination with decreased participation in physical education classes have contributed to a more sedentary lifestyle. Compared to the general population, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders exercise even less.¹ A diet consisting of foods high in calories and low in nutritional value and/or decreases in physical activity can increase health risks and increase weight. Currently, 40% of US children aged five to eight have at least one risk factor for heart disease.² Unless parents address these risk factors now, the health problems our kids face today will follow them into adulthood.

First, we must recognize the difference between being obese and overweight. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is defined as "an excessively high amount of body fat in relation to lean body mass." The term overweight refers to "increased body weight in relation to height when compared to some standard of acceptable or desirable weight."³ Overweight adults and children are at an increased risk of physical ailments. The lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and increased media consumption contribute to emerging health issues for our children, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure⁴, diabetes, gall bladder disease and sleep apnea.⁵

In a 1998 report conducted by the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 26.5% of the adolescents studied were obese. Asian Americans as a whole had a lower rate of obesity (20.6%) than African Americans (30.9%), Latinos (30.4%) and Caucasians (24.2%). Among these Asian American adolescents, 25.7% of males and 15.0% of females were obese. However, if you think that your children have a natural resistance against obesity, consider that Asian American adolescents born in the US to immigrant parents are more than twice as likely to be overweight as foreign born adolescents. For example, among male adolescents of Asian descent,



□ Obesity Rate of Asian Male Adolescents

Source: *Journal of Nutrition*, 1998

the first (immigrant) generation displayed a 15.6% obesity rate, 2nd (born in the US with at least one foreign born parent) generation 30.8% and the 3rd generation (born in the US of Native born parents) generation 34.6%. This study demonstrates that acculturation or assimilation into a mainstream American lifestyle increases the risk factor for obesity among Asian Americans.⁶

What You Can Do To Help:

Offering alternatives to sedentary behavior

According to the President's Report on Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports, it is recommended that children have 60 minutes of physical activity a day.⁷ If your children are not getting any physical activity now, help them work up to 60 minutes a day. This does not necessarily mean that kids must have a "workout"; they can accumulate 60 minutes through 10 to 15 minute periods of movement throughout the day to fulfill the recommendation. Moderate to vigorous physical activities are one of the most effective ways to combat obesity. In addition to physical activities, pro-social activities such as joining school and community clubs, taking classes or spending time with the family not only provide excellent opportunities for displacing sedentary activities like watching TV or playing video games, they also build self-esteem and goals for the future through group interaction. Many community groups in your area may offer team sports and other organized activities for kids that you may want to consider.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, it is important for parents and families to support children in

the following ways⁸:

- ➔ Support regular physical activity at home, school, and within the community
- ➔ Foster a child's self-efficacy (the sense that she or he is "good" at a particular activity)
- ➔ Promote activities that the child enjoys
- ➔ Limit the amount of time children spend in front of TVs, computers and video game consoles
- ➔ Encourage physical activity as playful and fun, rather than competitive and punitive
- ➔ Promote and support physical activities in a way that is sensitive to one's culture

Remember, we can spare our kids the chronic illness of tomorrow with positive prevention today. For more information on obesity and other health issues, check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa, the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org/family/fitness.htm, or the American Academy of Family Physicians at www.aafp.org/afp/20010915/tips/7.html ■

¹ *National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute*, 2000

² *ACSM Health & Fitness Journal*, 1998

³ www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/basics.htm

⁴ *The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, 2001

⁵ *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 2002

⁶ *Journal of Nutrition*, 1998

⁷ *President's Report on Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports*, November 2002

⁸ *American Academy of Family Physicians*, 2002

