



Teach Your Children Well: The Food Revolution

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Sometimes we are too tired. Sometimes we are too busy. Sometimes we just don't want to fight. The busy world we live in can make it difficult to provide healthy eating options and opportunities for exercise, let alone model these behaviors for our children. This scenario has played out around our country creating the first generation in history with a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

Inspired to help our children, First Lady Michelle Obama has spearheaded a national obesity initiative called Let's Move. The ideas are simple: get kids started off on the right foot with early exposure to healthy foods, exercise and decreased screen time. The Let's Move campaign also aims to improve school lunches and overall access to healthy food; and incorporate physical activity in our communities. Recently, the White House Task Force released a more detailed approach on how to accomplish these goals.

As with most things in life, this is easier said than done. We could talk to our children about calories, fruits and vegetables, and specific exercises, but we would run the risk of missing the bigger picture. This revolution sweeping our country cannot be successful without reframing why we eat. We need to teach our children that we eat food to fuel our bodies. Currently, most of us eat for all the wrong reasons. We eat because it is time to eat. We eat because we are celebrating. We eat because we are sad. We eat because the commercial made it look so good. You get the point. Most kids and adults in our country cannot identify the feeling of hunger. We need to teach our children that eating healthy will allow them to stay well and have energy to play, run, think and have fun! Putting eating back into the context of daily bodily maintenance is a healthy framework in which to place the remaining pieces.

So, beginning today, you can teach your children three main principles to help them fight obesity.

- 1) Teach your children to ask themselves, "Am I hungry?" before eating. Our goal is to help them

develop a healthy lifelong relationship with food and this should be at the foundation. Teach them that sometimes their bodies will need foods that they don't think taste good. Again, eating isn't always about food tasting good. Also, refrain from trying to get them to eat a certain amount of food. They need to learn to listen to and trust their bodies' messages. Empower them.

- 2) Teach your children moderation. Help them understand that their bodies need a variety of foods to thrive. Do not eliminate their favorite unhealthy foods, but simply teach them to either have smaller portions or less frequent options. This will eliminate the development of cravings for the forbidden foods. For example, if your son usually has Doritos with his sandwich at lunch; give him half Doritos and half baked Doritos. Slowly transition to all baked Doritos. Then give him a half portion and substitute a rice cake.
- 3) Teach your children that the choice is not to exercise or not exercise, but which exercise to choose. Your children should be moving their bodies for a least an hour per day. Keep it fun! Explore new activities together like hiking, rock climbing, trampoline jumping or skating. Or keep it in your own backyard with hopscotch, hula hoop, and slip and slide. It doesn't matter which activity they choose. Remember, the goal is for them to develop a lifelong relationship with exercise. A relationship so strong that they will not question whether they should exercise every day.

Fighting obesity is truly a revolution. It will require change, hard work and determination. Sounds a lot like parenting, huh? Your job is to teach your children to develop a lifelong healthy relationship with food and exercise. Teach your children well.

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