

An Insidious Attack on Our Nation's Youth

Did you know that “A new study from the Pentagon shows that 77% of young Americans would not qualify for military service without a waiver due to being overweight, using drugs or having mental and physical health problems”?

Yes, more than 3 out of every 4 Americans aged 17-24 would be ineligible for military service. Is this not a crisis—not so much for the military, but for these young people themselves?

According to the study, “When considering youth disqualified for one reason alone, the most prevalent disqualification rates are overweight (11%), drug and alcohol abuse (8%) and medical/physical health (7%).”

These statistics raise serious concerns on many fronts. But let's focus here on the subject of kids being overweight today.

According to the CDC, “Childhood obesity is a serious problem in the United States, putting children and adolescents at risk for poor health.”

Yet this reflects the environment in which these kids are being raised even more than it reflects their own choices. After all, if there's not unhealthy food in the house, kids will not be eating as much unhealthy food. This is especially true for younger kids who do not have access to outside choices.

And if there was more careful parental supervision (or, better parental examples being set), these kids would not be permitted to (or, worse still, encouraged) to overeat.

That's what makes this major health problem all the more

tragic. It's a self-made crisis.

One year ago, US News and World Report reported that, "For the first time ever, more than 1 in 5 American kids is obese.

"From 2011 to 2012 and again from 2017 to 2020, rates of obesity rose for kids between 2 and 5 years of age as well as 12- to 19-year-olds, a new analysis of nationwide health survey data shows. And the uptick was true for U.S. kids of every race and ethnic background, according to study leader Amanda Staiano."

As for the percentage of American kids who are overweight, that is obviously much higher than those who qualify as being obese (including almost 1 in 10 who are extremely obese).

Staiano added, "What is even more alarming is these data were all collected prior to the COVID pandemic, and other data published recently show that kids are gaining even more weight because of restrictions to their diet and activity during the pandemic."

As for the health risks associated with obesity, especially beginning in childhood, they include "some cancers," along with "diabetes, heart disease, asthma, joint problems, anxiety and depression." All this is so unnecessary.

Staiano also noted that, "Kids are bearing the cost of this disease, and adults are paying for the added health care costs of kids growing up with diseases and needing treatment. Kids who aren't eating nutritious diets tend to perform worse in school, and so obesity affects every area of a child's life."

Yet the news gets worse.

Just this week, the Daily Mail shared details of a study published in the journal Nature Communications. It "showed that 18 out of the 26 cancers examined are linked to being overweight or obese as a young adult. ... The risk was found to

be notably higher the longer someone is overweight or obese as a young adult.”

Isn't this heartbreaking?

A May 2023 article from the U.K. actually stated that, “The number of children and teens undergoing weight loss surgeries to treat their obesity has nearly doubled in recent years.”

Yet, to repeat, almost all of this is totally unnecessary, being the direct result of choices that are being made—although, to repeat, I look at these kids as victims far more than as perpetrators. Had they been raised in a different environment, the vast majority of them would not be struggling with obesity or being overweight today.

To be absolutely clear, though, I'm the last one to condemn another person for unhealthy eating. As some of you know, I was the poster boy for unhealthy eating for much of the first 59 years of my life.

I had Oreos for breakfast as a boy and had a hamburger and fries at least five days a week while in middle school. I ate pizza daily for years and was a serious chocoholic. And as I got older, I was overweight, at times even obese.

Thankfully, the Lord graciously intervened in 2014, and I have followed a radical, plant-based diet ever since. As I have often shared, it has been gloriously life transforming. (The book my wife and I wrote on our journeys is titled “Breaking the Stronghold of Food: How We Conquered Food Addictions and Discovered a New Way of Living.”)

So, once again, I am the last one to be critical of others, especially kids. And I'm certainly glad that these kids are not starving themselves (especially the girls), becoming anorexic in the process. I'm also glad that less of them feel the pressure of having “perfect” bodies (again, especially the girls), although I'm sure that pressure remains for many.

I'm simply bringing attention to the fact that great, lasting harm is being done to our kids today, some of it irreversible, and it is all so unneeded.

We do not have to be slaves to the American diet and the American lifestyle. There is a better way.

And if God could help someone like me—a lifelong unhealthy eater, and my wife Nancy, a self-confessed former glutton—make radical changes, He can help anyone.

Can I at least ask each parent (and young person) reading this article to take a minute and read this report about a relevant, eye-opening lecture by Dr. Joel Fuhrman? Speaking in 2017 about the standard American diet, Dr. Fuhrman said, “This diet couldn’t be better designed if it was made by ISIS to kill us,”

And for those who want to dig deeper, would you at least read the introduction and opening chapter of his book “The End of Dieting”?

The earlier these healthy choices are made, the greater the chances of lifelong health and thriving, both physically and mentally.

Let’s do the right thing for our kids and grandkids (and ourselves). We owe it to them (and ourselves). {eoa}