

Overweight Kids and Media

 **Take these steps to combat child obesity and curb appetites for unhealthy media consumption**

As a mother, I want the best for my kids. I will do just about anything to help them become the man or woman they were designed to be. However, in today's crazy world of diets and excess, it's no easy task to raise children who eat right and feel good about their bodies.

The fact that more than one-third of America's kids struggle with their weight is an indication our country is facing an epidemic of obesity. As a parent, you play a vital role in keeping your kids from becoming statistics of this growing national crisis.

Though the fight against childhood obesity has to be tackled on many fronts, there's one you can begin to influence right now: Limit the amount of time your child spends in front of screens.

Technology powerfully influences our children and prevents them from getting enough physical exercise. Television, computers, video games, and hand-held electronic games all vie for our children's time and attention. Time once spent outside and running around the neighborhood or in imaginative play is now spent in front of media screens. Consequently, we need to pay attention to what messages are being sent through advertisements.

I have a television, and my children do watch it. I'm not a parent who has thrown out the TV and banned all electronics. Media can be used to entertain and educate our children in wonderful ways.

However, media can become problematic when consumed in excess and when advertisements aren't discussed. Young children have

a hard time understanding that ads are not instructions about what to eat.

Equally troubling is the reality that many children are unsupervised when it comes to discerning what is appropriate for their age group. Young children should not be responsible for sifting through the messages they are being fed. That is the responsibility of the parents. The quality and content of both the TV shows and the Internet Web sites children frequent should be familiar to parents.

Take these steps to combat child obesity and curb appetites for unhealthy media consumption:

Be a positive media role model. If your children see you plop down in front of the television night after night, they will learn to do the same. Turn it off and engage in some other activity with your family.

Set time limits on playing video games. In a recent study that looked at environmental factors and obesity, video game playing was associated with childhood obesity. By limiting the time your children play video games, you open up time for other physical activity to occur.

Aim for two hours or less per day of all screen media for your children. One thing that will help you enforce this limit is to take the television and video-game system out of your child's bedroom and put them in a room where you can monitor their use.

Help your children avoid the unhealthy food ads. Fast-forward past them or click them off the screen. Advertisers target kids with all types of media, even books, and try to influence them to buy unhealthy products that contribute to weight gain. Viewing these food ads encourages overeating and eating unhealthy foods.

Encourage interactive play with other children. This not only

gets kids up and moving but also improves their social skills and peer relationships. Screens can be isolating.

The point of all these recommendations is to encourage you to take control of your children's media environment and help them develop healthy habits and discernment. For some of you this will mean getting control over your own media habits as well.

If you would like further information about how to raise healthy children despite what is happening in our culture, read my new book, *Overweight Kids*. I'm convinced the battle of the bulge can be won!

Our children are the greatest legacy we have. Their well-being should be important to us. Let's make it possible for them to grow in confidence and live long, healthy lives.