

The number of overweight children and fathers is increasing. Currently, over 64% of the U.S. population is overweight, and 22% of kids between 6 and 18 are considered obese (obesity being 20% or more overweight). Being overweight has health disadvantages, but children who are overweight are often victims of ridicule and teasing as well.

At the University of Minnesota, researchers surveyed over 4,000 7th through 12th graders on body satisfaction, self-esteem, depression, and teasing. They found 30% of adolescent girls and 25% of boys were teased by peers concerning their weight. Additionally, 28% of girls and 16% of boys were teased by family members.

To combat this trend of unnecessary weight and body image problems, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents have an annual Body-Mass Index (BMI) check to identify and prevent obesity. One study (Golan, 1999) found that both fathers and children lost weight when fathers were educated on the importance of exercise, good eating habits, and the dangers of a sedentary lifestyle.

To Think About ...

What kind of influence are you having on your children's health habits? One of the most important factors is your modeling -- your own diet and exercise habits. A 1999 study by Child Trends concluded that, "the most serious threat to the health of American children is the behavior of their own parents." Other research found that families where fathers modeled and supported good eating habits tended to eat more meals together, watch TV less, and exercise more often.

Though many studies focus on obesity, fathers can also influence their children toward the opposite extreme. And in both cases, attitude is as critical as habit.

When John noticed his 13-year-old daughter Gwen gaining a few extra pounds, he was horrified. John's mother had been overweight his entire life, and he began to project his feelings onto his daughter by teasing and badgering her. At age 15, Gwen was hospitalized for anorexia. Her fixation with her own body image had roots in her father's discontent with her weight years earlier. Fortunately, John recognized his error and began to focus on his relationship with her instead of his desire for her to be thin.

In the Trenches ...

As some of you may know, Randall Nulton, NCF's National Seminar Director for the past 11 years, has been facing some serious health challenges after discovering several months ago that he has melanoma. This week, he had successful surgery in his neck area, and his recovery during the next two weeks is critical. Your prayers are appreciated. If you'd like to send him a short note of encouragement, please click [here](#).

ACTION POINTS for Committed Fathers

1. Make an appointment with your doctor for that long-overdue physical and report the results to your family.
2. Ask your children what changes your family could make to have a healthier lifestyle.

3. Find a challenging sport that you and your child enjoy and, with your doctor's approval, schedule times to do it together (tennis, running, cycling, hiking, basketball, etc.).
4. Consider limiting your kids' TV viewing, computer time, video games, and other sedentary activities.
5. Encourage your older child to look for an active job: paper carrier, lawn service, soccer coach, snow removal, etc.