

food for thought.



Our children today are facing a **devastating** and **deadly** epidemic.

The words are frightening;
the **reality** is worse.

U.S. schoolchildren today are facing a deadly epidemic. Obesity is the fastest growing cause of illness and death, killing one American every 90 seconds.

Even more frightening, obesity in U.S. children has doubled in the past 20 years.



Calories 120
Sugars 30g
NUTRITIONAL VALUE: LOW

Calories 120
Fat 5g
NUTRITIONAL VALUE: 0

Calories 310
Fat 9g
Cholesterol 80mg
NUTRITIONAL VALUE: 0



THE HARSH REALITIES ::

According to recent statistics, **35 percent** of Texas school-age children are overweight or obese (severely overweight) –higher than the national average.¹

Children who are overweight at age 12 face a **75 percent** chance of becoming overweight adults, putting them at risk for a host of serious long-term illnesses, including Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, high blood pressure, gallbladder disease, asthma and certain cancers.²

About 17 million people in the United States currently have diabetes, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently projected that the lifetime risk of developing diabetes for children born in 2000 was more than **30 percent** for males and almost **40 percent** for females.³

Diabetes is the main cause of kidney failure, limb amputations and blindness in adults and a major cause of heart disease and stroke. In 2001, there were 7,000 diabetes-related amputations in Texas.⁴ Even worse, a recent review showed that the life expectancy of a child who develops the disease before age 15 is reduced by **27 years**.⁵

Investigators at Texas Children’s Hospital have found that **15 to 20 percent** of obese children in Houston have evidence of fatty liver disease, a serious and

“Why will people only use the best gasoline and oil in their vehicle, but then fill their bodies up with ‘junk food?’”

Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.S.
United States Surgeon General – January 6, 2003

perhaps irreversible illness. Biopsies of these children show cirrhosis of the liver, a disease similar to that seen in adult alcoholics.⁶

According to one longitudinal study, **61 percent** of the children aged 5 to 10 who were overweight had one or more cardiovascular disease risk factors and **27 percent** had two or more.⁷

Obese children often struggle with self-esteem and depression. They miss **three or four times** as much school as their normal-weight peers and are more likely to report feeling socially isolated, a University of California study showed.⁸



THE BOTTOM LINE ::

The estimated cost of adult overweight and obesity in Texas was **\$10.2 billion** in 2001.⁹ This includes an estimated \$4.1 billion for health care alone, and an additional \$6.1 billion impact from lost productivity (wages and the value of household work) due to illness, disability and premature death. This cost averages out to about \$682 per adult Texan.

Check It Out!

Adult obesity is defined by body mass, which is determined by weight related to height.

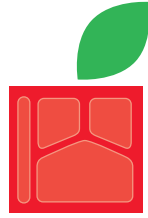
The **Body Mass Index (BMI)** is calculated by dividing weight in pounds by the square of height in inches. Multiply that number by 703. For example, the BMI for a 5'5" adult weighing 140 pounds would be calculated as follows:

$$140 \text{ (weight in pounds)} \div 4225 \text{ (65 inches squared)} = .033 \times 703 = 23 \text{ (BMI).}$$

For adults, a BMI of 25-30 is considered overweight.
A BMI over 30 means obese. The rankings for children vary by age and gender.

A child's BMI must be plotted according to his or her age on a gender-specific chart. These charts are available online from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/bmi-for-age.htm.

But there is hope.





BUT THERE IS HOPE ::

The reality is shocking: obesity is not only threatening the lives of adults, it's threatening our kids. Childhood obesity in this land of plenty has doubled in the last 20 years. Children are developing diabetes and heart disease at alarming rates. Perhaps most frightening, our children's life expectancy now may be less than ours.

It's time for us to make some changes. I am hopeful, because I know this is not the future you want for our children. By acting together, we can fight to save the lives of the 4 million Texas schoolchildren in our care.

Texas schools serve more than 400 million lunches and almost 200 million breakfasts each year, all of which meet federal nutrition guidelines. Together these meals should provide 60 percent of the students' dietary needs. But we are helping our kids make bad choices.

The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts estimates that there may be between **26,000 to 39,000 vending machines** being operated in Texas schools. Even by a very conservative estimate, about \$104 million in revenues are being generated by these vending machines, diverting sales that could go to the cafeteria. On top of this, it is estimated that an additional \$60 million in cafeteria sales is lost to other competitive food sales.¹⁰ When students choose unhealthy snacks instead of more nutritious foods from the cafeteria, they are hurting themselves, increasing their chances for long-term health problems—and early death.

We need to help our students make better choices. That's why the Texas Department of Agriculture's new Food and Nutrition Division is teaming up with school districts, foodservice directors, parents and physicians to help schools develop healthier food choices for Texas public schoolchildren through the school meal programs.

There are many leaders in the battle against childhood obesity, including the school districts, where high-sugar snack foods have been removed from vending machines, non-carbonated drinks have replaced colas and physical activity during and after school is encouraged.

But there is no quick fix. This is about more than vending machines. To battle this epidemic, avert the looming healthcare crisis and save the lives of the children of Texas, **we need to actively lead the way.** We need to get up out of our chairs and **take the first step.** I am very hopeful that we will be successful – because I know you care. This is a fight we cannot afford to lose. The cost to our children is already too high.



Susan Combs

Texas Agriculture Commissioner



“As a nation, we need to respond as vigorously to this (obesity) epidemic as we do to an infectious disease epidemic.”

Dr. Jeffrey P. Koplan, Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – October 4, 2000



TEN STEPS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW ::

There are thousands of teachers, staff and administrators in Texas schools. That's an incredible army of forces to battle this epidemic, helping to save the lives of the 4 million students in our care.

SMALL STEPS ::

Lead by example. Eat healthy foods and be physically active. An apple on the teacher's desk is not a bad idea! Take five minutes for yourself six times a day—park further away, take a stretch break, walk up and down the stairs for no reason.

Promote non-food rewards in the classroom: stickers, coupons for extra computer or reading time, pedometers or gift certificates from local merchants.

Educate faculty and staff, as well as students. Arm your teachers with the facts, provide information on available resources like those on the next page, and post nutrition facts in the school cafeteria.

Sponsor a district or campus health fair. Invite local professionals to attend and provide information to teachers, parents and students.

BIG STEPS ::

Inventory school vending machines and opt for more nutritious selections such as trail mix, graham crackers, baked tortilla chips, bottled water and 2 percent milk.

Encourage campus groups to sponsor activity-based, non-food fundraisers like walkathons, jumpathons, closest-to-the-hole golf (or Frisbee golf) tournaments or car washes. Sell seat cushions for sporting events, pedometers to encourage physical activity or bricks with donor names engraved for the courtyard.

Invite parents, teachers and students to participate in after-school wellness programs. Sponsor a dunk-off or dance competition between the groups. Invite outside organizations and clubs to host.

Tap into every available resource. Utilize School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) to develop district and campus student wellness policies. Explore grant funding for innovative nutrition programs. The obesity problem will take lots of hands and minds working together.

GIANT STEPS ::

Spread the word. Incorporate nutrition messages into core subjects. Have students calculate calories expended versus calories consumed, research nutrition values of fast food, or write a report on the symptoms of diabetes. Get everyone involved.

Lead by action. Adopt district-wide policies that support long-term nutrition education, physical activity and healthy food choices for students.



What are your great ideas? We'd love to hear about what you are doing at your school. By sharing ideas and successes, we can benefit all Texas schoolchildren. Let us know. Send to healthykids@agr.state.tx.us.

“There is a crisis of obesity in our society, but the real tragedy is the poor health permeating our schools.”

Dr. Charles Bailey, President
Texas Medical Association – August 27, 2003



OTHERS CAN HELP ::

For more information on fighting childhood obesity, check out these resources:

Texas Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition
www.agr.state.tx.us

Texas Department of Health
Public Health Nutrition Program
www.tdh.state.tx.us/phn/default.htm

Texas Department of Human Services /
Texas N.E.T. (Nutrition Education and
Training) Library
<http://snplibrary.dhs.state.tx.us/snp/>

USDA Child Nutrition
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd

USDA Team Nutrition
www.fns.usda.gov/tn

USDA Food and Nutrition
Information Center
www.nal.usda.gov/fnic

Healthy School Meals Resource System
<http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001/>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans
www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/dga/index.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

BAM! (Body and Mind)
www.bam.gov

CDC School Health Index
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/SHI/index.htm

Healthy Schools Healthy Kids
www.schoolhealth.info

National School Boards Association School
Health Programs
www.nsba.org (click on “Information and
Research”)

HealthierUS Initiative
www.healthierus.gov

Government Nutrition Sites
www.nutrition.gov



“If nothing is done to stop this epidemic of obesity, children of this generation, on average, are unlikely to live as long as their parents.”

Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas, Statewide Obesity Taskforce, February 2003, page 17.



“Why are our kids overweight and obese? Very simple. They are not eating right and they are not getting enough physical activity.”

Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.S.
United States Surgeon General – January 6, 2003

Office of Disease Prevention and
Health Promotion, U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services,
A Guide to Reliable Health Information
www.healthfinder.gov

Healthy People 2010
www.healthypeople.gov

Action for Healthy Kids
www.actionforhealthykids.org

Grant Information:
The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
www.cfda.gov

**For Information on Fresh Texas Fruits
and Vegetables:**
Texas Department of Agriculture
www.PickTexas.com

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture
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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director,
Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building,
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
or call 202/720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal
opportunity provider and employer.

Sources:

¹Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas,
Statewide Obesity Taskforce, February 2003, page 13.
Available at www.tdh.state.tx.us/phn/obesity-plan.pdf.
Accessed August 29, 2003.

²Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas, page 14.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preventing
Diabetes and Its Complications*, July 2003. Available at
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/pe_factsheets/pe_ddt.htm.
Accessed August 29, 2003.

⁴Figure provided by the Texas Department of Health,
November 2003.

⁵Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas, page 17.

⁶Information provided by Texas Children’s Hospital, 2003.

⁷Freedman DS, Dietz WH, Srinivasan SR, Berenson GS.
The relation of overweight to cardiovascular risk factors
among children and adolescents: the Bogalusa heart study.
Pediatrics 1999; 103: 1175-82.

⁸Schwimmer JB, Burwinkle TM, Varni JW. Health-Related
Quality of Life of Severely Obese Children and Adolescents.
Journal of the American Medical Association 2003;
289:1813-1819

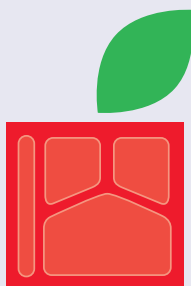
⁹Cost estimates provided by the Texas Department of
Health, November 2003.

¹⁰Estimates provided by the Texas Comptroller of Public
Accounts.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mayo Clinic, Obesity Week, Office
of the United States Surgeon General, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Statewide Obesity
Taskforce, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Texas Department of Agriculture

Susan Combs, Commissioner



square meals

Nourishing children's bodies and minds.

A Program of the Texas Department of Agriculture's
Food and Nutrition Division

For more information, please call (512) 463-2076

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