

Couch Potato Central

In 2007, a report highlighted a "big" problem in the United States. People had been gaining weight-and they were getting larger at an alarming rate. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 100 million adults in the United States were **obese**, or severely overweight.

It wasn't just adults who had expanding waistlines. Over the previous 20 years, the percentage of overweight kids in the United States had doubled. When the report was released, about 25 million kids were overweight. That was one out of every three kids.



Chris Hondros/AFP/Getty Images

Obesity became a serious dietary problem in the United States.

Being overweight can lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes, later in life. "Obesity...is now the most serious dietary problem affecting the health of American children," said nutrition expert Marion Nestle.

Tipping the Scales

So why were so many people packing on the pounds? People gain weight when they take in more **calories** than they use up through activity. A calorie is a measure of the amount of energy from food.

Exercise burns calories, but kids weren't moving as much as kids did in the past. Studies showed that kids were spending more time than ever before watching television, playing video games, and sitting at computers.

Some schools had also dropped recess in favor of more classroom time. Other schools had cut back on their physical education programs.

At the same time, portions at many fast-food restaurants had become supersized. In 1957, the average hamburger weighed 1 ounce and had 210 calories. In 2007, it had grown to 6 ounces and contained 618 calories.

Many people couldn't resist the larger portion sizes and had included more fries, burgers, and other fast foods in their diets. On average, it was estimated that an American kid ate a fast-food meal once every three days.

Megameals can't take all the blame. Kids are exposed to more than 10,000 television ads for candy, soft drinks, and other sugary snacks. Very few television ads promote healthful foods, such as fruits and vegetables.



Joe Raedle/Getty Images

On average, an American kid ate a fast-food meal once every three days.

Battling the Bulge

To help fight the problem, the U.S. government has issued new guidelines for healthful eating. The guidelines recommend that kids exercise for at least 60 minutes a day and eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Parents, schools, and health officials have also started to help kids battle the bulge. Even some fast-food restaurants have been working to make their meals more healthful.

Schools in California, Texas, and New York toughened their junk food policies. They

have banned

soft drinks and other junk food. Candy and other sugary snacks in school vending machines have been replaced with more healthful choices, such as nuts, bottled water, and granola bars. Schools have also reworked their lunch programs to include more fruits and vegetables.

In addition, some schools have been motivating couch potatoes to get up and move. Those schools have found new ways of encouraging physical activity in students. In Hortonville, Wisconsin, gym classes have been teaching kids that exercise can be fun. Kids go in-line skating and dance to videos. One Hortonville school even raised money for a rock-climbing wall.

Are these fun programs working? Eleven-year-old Logan Beck from Wisconsin thinks so. He says that the mix of fun things makes him "more active."



USDA.gov

Many schools have changed their lunch programs to include more fruits and vegetables.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, about how many kids were overweight in the United States in 2007?

- A. 100 million
- B. 25 million
- C. 20 million
- D. 10,000

2. Being severely overweight can lead to serious health problems for kids later in life. Which of the following does the passage suggest as a solution to kids for keeping their bodies fit?

- A. eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- B. get at least 60 minutes of exercise each day
- C. remove soft drinks and junk food from school vending machines
- D. all of the above

3. Which of the following conclusions about the obesity problem is supported by this passage?

- A. Many factors contribute to the obesity problem.
- B. Supersized portions at fast-food restaurants are completely to blame.
- C. American kids don't eat that much fast food.
- D. Ads on TV will start promoting healthy foods.

4. Read the following sentence from the passage: "Many people couldn't resist the larger portion sizes and had included more fries, burgers, and other fast foods in their diets."

In this sentence, the word **resist** means

- A. taste
- B. stay away from
- C. widely accept
- D. cook

5. Which statement best describes the central idea of this passage?

- A. Some schools have toughened their junk food policies.
- B. Obesity has been a growing problem in the United States.
- C. Portions at many fast-food restaurants have gotten bigger.
- D. The U.S. government issued guidelines for healthful eating.

6. Why had obesity become such a big problem in the United States?

7. How might schools that find ways to encourage fun physical activity help kids lead more active lives in the future? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

The percentage of overweight kids in America had doubled between 1987 and 2007, _____ the U.S. government issued guidelines for healthful eating and exercise.

- A. before
- B. so
- C. after
- D. next

9. Vocabulary Word: ban: to forbid.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: