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Judith S. Kronick

University of Connecticut School of Medicine and Dentistry

Alberta Richetelle

University of Connecticut School of Medicine and Dentistry

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HEALTHNET NEWS

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SPECIAL ISSUE



This issue of Healthnet News focuses on obesity - an increasing, prevalent worldwide health problem that seems to be discussed in the news media each day. Obesity and the dangers of trans fat consumption, lack of exercise among American youngsters, increased rates of type 2 diabetes, and fast food consumption have become areas of concern to public health officials and health care professionals as well as health consumers.

This issue describes sources of information on obesity-related topics such as evaluating diets, nutrition, exercise, weight loss surgery, and eating disorders.

How extensive is the problem?

A recent U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention telephone health survey, entitled Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, described online at <http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/>, found a twenty-two per cent prevalence of obesity among both American men and women, a seven per cent increase from 1995. An even higher percentage of obesity, thirty-two per cent, was found among U.S. adults in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which was based on actually weighing and measuring participants (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/overwt.htm>). Healthy (and unhealthy) weights are often described with a measure called Body Mass Index, an indication of total body fat. Body Mass Index can be determined with a calculation that involves dividing a person's weight in kilograms by height in meters squared. The mathematical formula is "weight (kg)/height (m²)". A convenient table to use to determine your Body Mass Index can be found at (<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/statistics/index.htm>).

Risks and challenges

According to the Weight-control Information Network of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, obesity can increase an individual's risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, sleep apnea, osteoarthritis, gallbladder disease, and fatty liver disease. (http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/health_risks.htm)

Maintaining a healthy weight has financial as well as health advantages. The Hartford-based Phoenix Insurance Companies, Inc. announced in November 2006 that it will give discounts to customers who purchase specific life insurance policies and maintain a healthy Body Mass Index score over a specified period of years.

Americans are frequently trying to lose weight, relying on diets, exercise, and medication. A small number of prescription weight loss medications have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. However, no over-the-counter weight loss medications have been approved.

Although Connecticut is among the states with the lowest percentage of residents who are obese (under twenty per cent), nutrition and exercise are health topics of importance to Connecticut health consumers.

The MayoClinic.com website <http://mayoclinic.com/health/obesity/DS00314> provides a brief, comprehensive overview of obesity and its health complications, risk factors for becoming obese, and treatments, including specific diet plans, surgery, and medications.



Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network

Lyman Maynard Stowe Library ♦ University of Connecticut Health Center

PO Box 4003 ♦ Farmington CT 06034-4003

Telephone: 860/679-4055 ♦ email : richetelle@nso.uhc.edu

<http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet>

HEALTHY EATING PLANS/NUTRITION

American Dietetic Association Complete Food and Nutrition Guide. Roberta Larson Luyff. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006. 676 p. (ISBN 0-470-04115-3 paperback, ISBN 0-470-04842-5 hardcover)

The revised and updated 3rd edition of the American Dietetic Association's comprehensive, consumer-friendly guide to healthy eating includes a section on "Your Healthy Weight." This section discusses such topics as "What's Your Healthy Weight?" effective weight management strategies, diets doomed to fail, and signs of eating disorders. The new edition includes the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the updated Dietary Reference Intakes, and MyPyramid. There are lots of menus and practical suggestions to help make healthful nutrition a reality.

Eat, Drink, and Weigh Less. Mollie Katzen and Walter Willett. Hyperion, 2006. 282 p. (ISBN 1-4013-0249-1) \$23.95 .

Physician Dr. Walter Willett, head of the Harvard School of Public Health's Department of Nutrition, and creative cookbook author and illustrator Mollie Katzen (**Moosewood Cookbook**, **Enchanted Broccoli Forest**, etc.) have collaborated to create a nine point healthy eating and weight reduction plan, based on the extensive research of Dr. Willett and his colleagues. The book's subtitle provides a clue to the diet plan - "A Flexible and Delicious Way to Shrink Your Waist Without Going Hungry." The plan focuses on adding healthful, enjoyable foods rather than omitting foods from one's diet. This lifelong strategy is not a vegetarian diet but a "balanced, sensible, vege-centric weight loss plan" that recommends gradual diet changes. It is "centered" on consuming fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and "healthy" oils. The foundation for achieving weight loss includes daily exercise as well as consuming healthy foods in reasonable portions. Adherence to the plan can be measured with a questionnaire that yields a higher "Body Score."

Among the helpful tips the book provides are warnings on "diet food imposters" such as brown bread that is not whole grain, recommendations for selecting healthier restaurant and convenience store foods, portable eating plans for travelers and college students, grocery shopping guide, bibliography of medical research articles, menus, and lots of imaginative, healthy recipes.

Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight for Everybody. Donald D. Hensrud, editor-in-chief. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 2005. 319 p. (ISBN 1-893005-34-8) \$22.95.

This is the "real" Mayo Clinic Diet that supplants all the quick-fix diets circulating that claim to be associated with the Mayo Clinic. A twelve week program for "long-term weight management" that encourages "healthy and enjoyable lifestyle changes," this plan features a "Healthy Weight Pyramid" that allows unlimited consumption of fruits and vegetables and a seventy-five calorie daily allowance of sweets. The book is enhanced by a colorful fourteen page visual guide with photographs of an effective exercise stance, features of a sturdy walking shoe, appropriate serving sizes, and a few enticing recipes, including chocolate pudding pie.

The eating plan emphasizes the importance of understanding energy density. The plan recommends consuming low calorie, low energy density foods that are filling... along with increased physical exercise. There are many strategies to overcome specific weight loss obstacles such as frequent travel, expense of fresh fruit and vegetables, lack of motivation to exercise, tempting party food, and snacking. The twelve week plan includes menus, shopping lists, and brief recipes.

The Mayo Clinic online Weight Loss Center at <http://mayoclinic.com/health/weight-loss/WT99999> provides a wealth of additional suggestions for implementing the book's program.

What to EAT. An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating. Marion Nestle. North Point Press, 2006. 611 p. (ISBN 0-86547-704-3) \$30.00.

Being confronted by the multitude of products in many supermarkets—sometimes as many as 30,000 to 40,000—can overwhelm even the most determined, health-minded shopper.



In her new consumer-friendly book, **What to EAT. An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating**, Marion Nestle, nutrition professor at New York University, and author of **Food Politics** (2002) and **Safe Food** (2003), sympathizes with this challenge. She illustrates her "basic principles" of healthy eating ("eat less, move more, eat lots of fruit and vegetables") and provides insight into the challenges and marketing strategies of the average American supermarket. The author discusses food labels, portion sizes, organic

foods, food safety, processed foods, bottled water, supplements and health food, irradiation, methyl mercury in fish, food industry health claims, prepared foods, and soy foods.

Ms. Nestle includes extensive background information on the food industry, food processing, and the transportation of foods across the country.

FOOD PYRAMID

Myramid.gov



MyPyramid.gov, online at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/> is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's current version of the recommended food pyramid. By specifying your age, gender, and daily activity level online you can retrieve a personalized version of the suggested eating plan, entitled "My Pyramid Plan." Your plan includes specific food amounts for each of five food groups and practical tips for incorporating these healthy foods into your diet. There is a worksheet for keeping track of your food choices and the amounts consumed.

Colorful posters of the children's version of the eating pyramid, as well as nutrition-related games, are online in the "For Kids" category.

A corresponding web site for children Intended to encourage children to spend less time playing video games and watching television, a corresponding graphic, MyActivity Pyramid, is available online <http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/hesguide/foodnut/n00386.htm>.

WEIGHT LOSS DIETS/WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Weight Loss and Nutrition Myths: How Much Do You Really Know?

<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/myths.htm - dietmyths>

"Eat as much as you want and still lose weight!" Sound too good to be true? Then it may not be a reliable weight loss plan. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases has assembled a variety of dieting myths (Certain foods, like grapefruit.. can burn fat and make you lose weight. ..Eating after 8 p.m. causes weight gain....Dairy products are fattening and unhealthy....) and responded with appropriate facts that dispel these myths.

Selecting a Weight Loss Program (Guidelines)

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/wtl_prog.htm

Questions to ask *before* signing up for a weight loss program. Published by the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute.

Fad Diets: What You Need To Know.

<http://familydoctor.org/784.xml>

Tips on how to recognize fad diets. The website also includes the names of specific fad diets organized by type, along with some advice on healthy ways to lose weight. From the American Academy of Family Physicians website.

Comparing Diets

<http://www.health.com/health/web/DietGuide/>

Written by registered dietitian Maureen Callahan, the Health magazine online Diet Guide provides specifics on thirty-nine popular weight loss diets. The reader can retrieve a chart comparing up to three selected diet plans according to length of diet, caffeine consumption, reliance on professional counselors, use of behavioral changes, convenience of eating out, and additional characteristics.

The brief descriptions of individual diet plans include information about how the diet works, its basic principles, and what foods you are allowed to eat. The full review of each diet answers such questions as: Is the diet healthy? Does it take weight off and maintain weight loss? Who should consider adopting this diet? What do the experts (often other dietitians) say?

An attractive, interesting-to-read website, that is very easy to navigate. Offers the user the chance to retrieve lots of detailed, evaluative information.

Popular Diets Reviewed

<http://www.eatright.org/>

This site has two online brochures written by dietitians who are members of the American Dietetic Association, national professional organization. The brochures analyze the effectiveness of popular weight loss diets.

To access these brochures, select the nutrition fact sheets about weight management under the “Food and Nutrition Information” area of the American Dietetic Association website.

Rating Popular Diets

<http://www.consumerwebwatch.org/dynamic/health-report-diet-site-ratings.cfm>

Ratings of websites that provide diet information, from Consumer Reports Webwatch.

Twenty popular websites were evaluated on ten “attributes”: identity, advertising and sponsorship disclosure, ease of use, privacy, contents, authorship, references, editorial policies, and diet self-help plans. The website ratings do not refer to the effectiveness of any diets discussed on the website. Only three of the twenty websites received an “excellent” rating from Consumer Reports: Aetna IntelliHealth, MedicineNet.com, and MayoClinic.com. Standard Consumer Reports rating symbols are used to indicate the overall and individual rating scores. There is a detailed explanation of the rating methodology.

Nutrition Action Health Letter volume 33 (number 6): July/August 2006 pp. 8-11

In the July/August 2006 issue, the consumer-friendly Nutrition Action Health Letter, published by Center for Science in the Public Interest, includes an evaluative overview of weight loss diets, and a brief, two-page chart describing eight popular diets. The chart answers questions about each diet such as: What is its main diet claim? What types of food are recommended? Is the science valid? Is the diet healthy? What is its worst feature? What is its most preposterous claim? The chart is followed by a very humorous, tongue-in-cheek article about “How to Write a Diet Book,” with advice such as: name your diet after a “trendy place,” make promises, and include many scientific terms. The article reassures potential authors that “you can always rehash some recent (or not so recent) diet theory” and “don’t worry if you have no expertise or degree.”

ETHNIC DIETS

Sisters Together

<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/sisters/index.htm>

Suggestions on exercise and healthy eating from a national initiative for Black women. From the federal Weight-control Information Network.

Heart-healthy Home cooking – African American Style

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/chdblack/cooking.htm>

A thirty-two page online cookbook that provides healthy, revised versions of favorite Southern recipes such as “Good-for-you Cornbread,” candied yams, chicken gumbo, and “mock-Southern sweet potato pie.” Printed copies may be ordered for a fee. Published by the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute of the National Institutes of Health.

Heart-healthy Latino Recipes

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/sp_recip.htm



Bilingual Spanish and English cookbook with healthy, revised recipes for such traditional Latino foods as Caribbean Pink Beans, oven-fried yucca, and Mexican pozole. Printed copies may be ordered for a fee. Published by the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute of the National Institutes of Health.

CHILDREN



Healthy Habits For Healthy Kids

http://www.wellpoint.com/healthy_parenting/index.html

How can parents concerned about their children's weight make changes to their family's lifestyle that will have a positive impact on their children's nutrition? The American Dietetic Association website's online booklet *Healthy Habits for Healthy Kids. A Nutrition and Activity Guide for Parents* at http://www.wellpoint.com/healthy_parenting/index.html focuses on making changes to the entire family's eating habits (serving healthy snacks, eating together, scheduling family walks, etc.) so that an overweight child will not feel embarrassed or singled out. It offers specific suggestions on dining out, sports the family can enjoy together, and recommends patience when trying to modify longstanding bad habits.

Is Dieting Ok For Kids?

http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/diet.html

This question may be in the minds of many media-conscious children, who are accustomed to seeing extremely thin models wearing glamorous clothes.

Written especially for children, this online explanation compares dieting for weight loss and an eating plan for healthy nutrition. It was written to encourage healthy eating and to discourage dangerous dieting among youngsters.

Verbnow

<http://www.verbnow.com/>

The website encourages participation in sports and games by allowing users to create characters, improve athletic skills, and play games that are described on the website. Created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Verbnow.com is an action-packed, activity-oriented website for children. Colorful and visually dynamic, it is designed to appeal to modern, visually-oriented children. It includes animated and real-life film clips.

A similar, colorful website for children, published by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation, an industry organization, along with some professional medical associations, is online at <http://www.kidnetic.com/>. The website also incorporates recipes for healthy snacks and health information.

A Parent's Guide to Childhood Obesity. Sandra Hassink, editor-in-chief. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006. 256 p. (ISBN 1-58110-198-8) \$15.95.

Practical recommendations for improving children's diets and encouraging children to participate in additional physical activity from the American Academy of Pediatrics, national professional association of pediatricians.

This helpful Guide offers advice about dealing with the emotional and social consequences of childhood obesity, such as its social stigma and possible low self-esteem. There are discussions about the role that parental style, family interactions, and emotions play in family eating habits as well as suggestions for helping an overweight child cope with teasing, holiday food temptations, and unhealthy snacking.

The book explains how to introduce dietary changes gradually, incorporate nutritious snacks daily, encourage support from other adults in the child's life, make modifications to the family environment, and make time for more frequent family physical activity.

Gordito Doesn't Mean Healthy. What Every Latina Mother Needs to Know to Raise Fit, Happy, Healthy Kids.

Claudia Gonzalez and Lourdes Alcaniz. Berkley Books, 2006. 295 p. (ISBN 0-425-20770-6 English language version, ISBN 0-425-20771-4 Spanish language version) \$13.00.

As Latinos in the United States adopt more unhealthy American eating habits, the risks of obesity and type 2 diabetes among Latino children increase. This supportive book, available in both English and Spanish versions, focuses on providing nutrition advice tailored to the dietary habits and cultural food-related customs of Latino families. Suggested menu plans include popular Latino foods such as papaya, yucca, black beans, and tortillas. The Latino Food Pyramid is included. The author is an experienced pediatric dietitian and Latino affairs spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

Weight Watchers Family Power: 5 simple rules for a healthy weight home.

Karen Miller-Kovach. John Wiley and Sons, 2006. 240 p. (ISBN 0-4717-7102-3) \$22.95

In a “healthy weight” home, parents make nutrition- and activity-directed decisions for their children and themselves that will lead to healthier weights for all of them. The author advocates five simple rules: base the family’s diet on nutritious foods (whole grains, water as the main beverage, fruits and vegetables daily, etc.), include some daily treats, restrict TV and computer time to less than two hours per day, be active for at least one hour daily, and the final rule is that the four previous rules apply to everyone in the family....yes, including parents.

Written by the Chief Scientific Officer of Weight Watchers International, Inc., the book includes guidance on preparing family members for change, serving as a healthy role model, and enforcing the book’s rules. There are practical strategies on learning appropriate portion sizes, adapting ethnic cuisine, encouraging a reluctant teenage, and involving a non-supportive spouse in the changes.

TEENS

Teen Weight Loss

<http://mayoclinic.com/health/teen-weight-loss/WT00012>

This Mayo Clinic web site provides some realistic, diplomatic suggestions for encouraging teenagers to modify their diets and increase their activity levels. This article reminds parents that there are no “quick fixes” to making these changes.

Celebrate Girls

<http://www.celebrate.uhc.edu/girls/body/nutrition.html>

Directed to adolescent girls, this website provides a brief overview of healthy food basics, discusses the importance of calcium in a young person’s diet, and encourages girls to exercise. Written by a registered dietitian, it is part of the *Celebrate Girls* website at <http://www.celebrate.uhc.edu/girls/>, a community educational outreach program of the University of Connecticut Health Center.

EATING DISORDERS

“I’m, Like, SO Fat! Helping your teen make healthy choices about eating and exercise in a weight-obsessed world. Dianne Neumark-Sztainer. Guilford Press, 2005. 316 p. (ISBN 1-57230-980-6 \$16.95 pap., ISBN 1-59385-167-7 \$35. hardcover)

Losing weight is often a healthy goal for teenagers as well as for adults. But when an adolescent’s obsession with calorie counting and extreme exercise verges toward behavior typical of youngsters with eating disorders, there may be cause for alarm. How can parents recognize the danger signals of extreme eating behaviors? How can they encourage their adolescents to adopt healthy eating and exercise habits and discourage them from embracing negative media images about normal body sizes?

Author Dr. Neumark-Sztainer has both personal and professional qualifications for guiding parents in this difficult challenge. A researcher and professor at the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Neumark-Sztainer is a specialist in adolescent eating behaviors and the parent of four teenagers.

In her book, she discourages formal dieting, which often promotes a diet-binge cycle, and encourages a pattern of healthy, lifelong eating and exercise habits. She emphasizes the importance of helping youngsters adopt positive attitudes toward their bodies and their self-worth as well as following a plan for “healthy weight management” (e.g. eating breakfast, including fruits and vegetables in most meals and snacks, trying everything at a meal but eating foods in smaller portions, etc.) Based on her research and experience, her book is readable and practical. It is interspersed with recommendations and explanations of “what you can do.” It includes suggestions for diplomatic ways to encourage healthy behavior among sensitive teenagers. She acknowledges the difficulties of implementing these recommendations....she’s a parent too.

Explaining Eating Disorders

http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/nutrition/eating_disorders.html

The Kidshealth website explains eating disorders, and other health topics, on three separate websites..one for children, one for teens, and one for parents. This Eating Disorders explanation, oriented toward parents, provides detailed information about anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, their causes, effects, warning signs, prevention, and treatment. There are suggestions for tactful and effective ways to approach a child you suspect has an eating disorder.

Bulimia Nervosa

<http://www.bulimiaguide.org/>

The Bulimia Nervosa Resource Guide is written for family and friends of patients, who want to understand this binge-eating focused eating disorder. The comprehensive information on the website includes causes, risk factors, symptoms, prevention, and treatment. There is a directory of U.S. treatment centers, information on health insurance benefits, resources and organizations, and recommendations for providing support.

EXERCISE

Active At Any Size

<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/active.htm>



The message of this online guide for adapting your activity program to your size is “If you are a very large person, you can still be physically active.” Suggestions for gradually increasing activity level and selecting exercises appropriate to for a very large person are presented in a brief, encouraging style.

Walking: A Step In The Right Direction

<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/walking.htm>

A sample walking program explaining exactly how to increase your weekly activity level. Warm-up exercises, and safety tips are included in this brief, online guide.

How Many Calories Did I Burn?

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/exercise/SM00109>

To determine how many calories that exhausting hour of jogging, aerobic dancing...or gardening actually burned, consult this chart on the MayoClinic.com health website (<http://www.mayoclinic.com>). The website includes instructions for adapting the calorie count to your exact weight.

DIET MEDICATIONS

Weight –loss Drugs

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/weight-loss-drugs/WT00013>

Can a prescription help you lose weight? According to an article on the MayoClinic.com website, medications may be effective but you need to try dieting and exercise first. Details about diet drug effectiveness and how they lead to weight loss are discussed in this brief online article.



Drugs and Supplements

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html>

Appropriate use of specific medications and herbal supplements, their side effects, and cautions in combining them with other drugs and supplements are described on the “Drugs and Supplements” section of the Medlineplus website, published by the National Library of Medicine.

Bogus Weight Loss Claims

<http://www.ftc.gov/redflag/>

“If the [commercial weight] loss claim seems too good to be true, it probably it, “ states the U.S. Federal Trade Commission website that introduces the FTC’s Red Flag brochure warning consumers of “bogus weight loss claims.” The FTC is the government agency that monitors deceptive advertising. The agency’s colorful Red Flag brochure reproduces scam advertisements and points out their specific deceptions. These “Reality Checks” remind consumers that there is no easy weight loss fix and that “meaningful weight loss requires consuming fewer calories and/or increasing exercise.”

How Safe Are Your Supplements?

<http://www.consumerlab.com/>

Since herbal supplements are not tested or regulated by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, the quality of individual products is difficult to determine. ConsumerLab.com, a privately held company, evaluates certain health and nutrition products and publishes the test results online at <http://www.consumerlab.com/>. The tests determine whether the product includes the ingredients that are stated on its label and, in some product evaluations, if it is contaminated. The company evaluates herbal and dietary supplements as well as vitamins and minerals, sports and energy nutrition products. A sampling of abbreviated test reports and recalls and warnings about products are available online to all. A more extensive array of complete product reviews and a Natural Products Encyclopedia is available only to subscribers.

FIND A NUTRITION PROFESSIONAL

American Dietetic Association

http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/home_4874_ENU_HTML.htm

Online consumer search engine for locating registered dietitians and registered dietetic technicians within specific U.S. areas. On the website of the American Dietetic Association, professional association of registered dietitians. These professionals provide “reliable, objective nutrition information, separate facts from fads, and translate the latest scientific findings into easy-to-understand nutrition information.” Searchable by zip code or city and state.



Healthnet News is written by Alberta L. Richetelle and Judith Kronick.

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