

Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle: Healthy Students Are Ready to Learn

Since 1980 the rates of obesity have tripled among adolescents. Statistics are showing that fewer than 25% of high school students consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Only 25% of students are reporting engaged in vigorous physical activity 5 or more days per week. A survey of 12-17 year olds showed that nearly 33% were overweight. A 2000 Los Angeles Times report on teens noted a correlation between poor diet, increased smoking, and limited physical activity with these teens spending double the days time watching TV or video games.

This article is designed to increase the awareness of students and their families about the risks of student obesity, physical activity involvement, and nutrition improvement. All foods can fit into a healthful eating style as a part of a balanced diet when consumed in moderation with appropriate portion sizes, and combined with regular, adequate physical activity.

One telltale sign that obesity among students has been termed an epidemic is health care providers are now treating diseases in students that until recently were diseases of middle-aged adults including heart disease, hypertension, and type II diabetes. A clear relationship has shown to also exist between student obesity and the increase in asthma.

In an effort to reverse this trend, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously accepted the recommendations of a task force they established to investigate this issue. They did agree there is a need for health promotion activities that inform people what constitutes healthy eating and physical activity so that people know what is “responsible” or “healthy behavior”.

One in four California adolescents is now considered “at risk” of becoming overweight. The rate of teen obesity may be as a result of many issues but basically young people are eating more calories and exercising less. Fast foods are an important part of this equation as they are high in fat, high in calories, and may supplant more nutritious foods in the diets of our adolescents.

The quality of adolescents’ diets impacts their performance in school. Studies show that an appropriate diet can improve problem-solving skills, test scores, and school attendance. Even moderate undernourishment can affect cognitive development and school performance. In summary, healthy students are ready to learn.

In conclusion one of our 11th grade students, Erica Assouline, as a 5th grader had a poem published in Images of Santa Clarita Valley. A portion of the poem could apply to us all: “ride your bike through the mountains, go along over the trail, through the bushes where you can see a rabbit’s bushy tail. As you ride on by, you can see the flower bed, some of the white, most of them red”. Hopefully we will all become more involved in our students’ physical activity and encourage them to make healthy choices.

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