

THE INTEGRATIVE HEALTH COACH by John Davidson

Obesity, National Security and the School Lunch

First Lady Michelle Obama is attempting to focus our attention on obesity.

Good for her!

Here are some facts, in case you've missed them.

One in three American children are obese. This is an epidemic far beyond the scope or even importance of an epidemic like the H1N1 virus. There has been less hype about obesity, perhaps because death from obesity is a slower process, and there is no vaccination for it.

Obesity is a primary risk factor for all major diseases, and continues to increase among younger age groups.

Mission: Readiness – an organization of retired admirals and generals – notes in a recent report that 75% of all young people aged 17 to 24 are unqualified for military service. One in four doesn't qualify for want of completion of high school. One in ten doesn't qualify because of a criminal record. One in two doesn't qualify due to health reasons, and obesity accounts for one third of those health problems.

These are incredible statistics. Seventy-five percent! And the 75%, when you dig into health studies, is all related in some degree to the same high sugar diet that fuels the obesity that makes up a good part of that figure.

It takes no imagination to guess what will happen to an overloaded health care system due to this problem alone in just a few years, not to mention the other health issues increasingly suffered by young and old alike.

A recent study from Temple University suggests that eating together as a family, reducing television time, and getting adequate sleep reduces the rates of obesity.

Dr. Mercola, who has several articles on this subject on his website (www.mercola.com), focuses on exercise (he wants to begin treating exercise like medicine: ughhh! What happened to play?), getting away from television, limiting intake of fructose to 25 grams a day, and cooking from scratch.

Most children are getting fructose in vastly higher amounts from processed foods, soft drinks, and candy, any of which may contain high-fructose corn syrup. High-fructose corn syrup has recently been reported to contain mercury, a toxin that is associated with many other health conditions, including autism.

Studies show that a diet high in fructose can create fat around the major organs in just a matter of weeks.

In today's political climate, it's unlikely that Congress is going to limit advertising by corporate sponsors who market fructose to children by intensive television campaigns.

What can you do?

Get educated.

One of my favorite sites on this issue addresses common sense for home diets and school food programs alike. Take a look at Ann Cooper's site at <http://www.chefann.com> and her blog site at <http://www.chefann.com/blog>

Known as The Renegade Lunch Lady, Ann Cooper provides great information on how school programs are fueling the obesity problem. Among other facts, she points out that the recent Administration obesity proposal of adding one billion dollars to the school lunch budget won't buy an

apple a day per student.

But there is a more fundamental issue beneath all of this that schools can't fix.

As a nation, we moved families off the farms and into cities decades ago. Decades later, children don't have any idea where food comes from. Does food really come from McDonald's, Pizza Hut and the supermarket?

As a parent, do you know where your food comes from, what's in it, or what's on it? Do you really understand that food became processed in the first place because of how far we live from the farm and because of the growing social demand for convenience? Are you paying attention to how much effort is spent to market sugar to your children? How do your children influence your food buying decisions?

The choices we have made as a culture have us spending more time sitting than gardening, and more time than most other developed countries working to pay for things we really don't need.

As I traveled recently through rural India amidst small plot farmlands, I saw no obesity. The same was true in the agricultural regions of Peru that I've visited during the last ten years. These are areas that have had no television, although corporate America is doing its best to "open up new markets" in these areas by making sure that televisions get there. Extended family groups are more common in these areas, although that is diminishing everywhere.

Obesity is not something we catch. It is a condition we have cultivated over many decades – a direct result of our hypnosis by the notion of progress that is characterized by urban living, technology and "modernity." Heaven help us if we put our medical money toward discovering a pill to cure it.

"When the hard times come," a friend in Peru told me years ago, "we know how to grow food." His point was that Americans don't know how, and that we are going to have a harder time of it. He was laughing as he said it, but I wasn't.

Many people are looking at the prophecies that have long pointed to the year 2012 as a critical turning point. While in Peru, my companions and I had occasion to ask indigenous spiritual leaders what they thought of those prophecies.

The answer was that hard times are coming, and they have been in the pipeline for a long time. They point not primarily at the prospect of natural disasters, but at the simple consequences of how we have chosen to live.

Obesity is one face of a coming disaster. If we are going to avoid it, we must each become educated about food and our relationship to food is a reflection of our relationship with the earth and ourselves.

It's encouraging to see young people in the rural area where I live "interning" on organic farms, and people like Ann Cooper promoting the idea of school children growing gardens as part of the curriculum.

Having just visited a "developing" country, I wonder if we are witnessing in our own country the birth of its opposite: the "undeveloping" country.

If we are going to avoid finding out the answer to that wonderment, we're going to need to do more than change school lunches.

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