

# ***CPYU Trend Alert:*** **"Youth and Obesity"**

by Kirk Ream

The June issue of *Time Magazine*\* presents an interesting and astounding look at the current health status of today's youth. Obesity is a major problem in American culture. According to *Time*, approximately 2/3 of American adults are overweight. In fact, in 23 states, 25% of the population is considered obese. Never before in the history of the world have we seen numbers this high.

Yet for some reason we view obesity and weight as an "adult" problem. After reading the article in *Time* it is impossible to continue with this misunderstanding. Our youth today have seen obesity increases in grown up proportions. Approximately 32% of our children are now overweight. Since 1971, children ages 2-19 have seen obesity levels increase approximately 12% with some age groups increasing as much as 14%.

These weight issues have led our children to experience "illnesses of excess" typically found in mid to late 40 year olds: heart disease, liver disease, diabetes, gallstones, joint breakdown and even brain damage as fluid accumulation inside the skull leads to headaches, vision problems and possibly lower IQs. It is feared by some health experts that our children's generation will be the first in American history to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. What a travesty.

As saddening and gloomy as this forecast may be, it is our job as parents and youth workers to begin to correct the problem. But with childhood obesity now considered in epidemic proportions the question is, "Where do we start?" The answer, as always, remains with Christ.

**First, reversing the current obesity problem begins at the feet of Jesus.** We must place our physical problems under the authority of Christ. Oftentimes we mistakenly buy into the lie that the Heavenly Father is more concerned with our spiritual development than our physical body. But listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; You were bought with a price, therefore honor God with your body*" (emphasis mine).

Unfortunately, we are often quick to point out that drugs and alcohol are wrong because of the effects they produce on the body. Yet at the same time, we continually consume foods and beverages that will most certainly lead to harmful effects such as diabetes, heart disease, and depression. Are either of these habits less honoring to God?

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**Second, reducing childhood obesity requires us to be realistic.** Each of us needs to take an honest look at our children's health status. Ask the following questions:

1. Is my child living an active lifestyle?
2. How many hours a day does my child spend watching television, playing video games, or surfing the Internet?
3. Is my child at a healthy weight for his/her age?
4. Does my child continually consume unhealthy processed foods?
5. Does my child understand that how he/she treats his/her body is an integral part of living a Christian life?

Answer these questions as honestly as possible and begin to address them with your children. Be sure to stress the importance of honoring God with our eating and exercising.

**Third, it is vital that we assume a position of leadership in modeling a healthy lifestyle.** As always actions speak louder than words. Although it may seem obvious, research has proven that 64% of children with obese parents become obese themselves. Nothing will have a greater impact on solving the current epidemic than parents teaching and modeling a healthy, Christ honoring lifestyle to their kids.

The *Time Magazine* articles do a tremendous job informing us of the current crisis. It is an excellent resource to read and share with your children. The articles can lead to an open discussion on the importance of glorifying God with our bodies. It can also help parents dispel the myth of dualism, separating body and spirit, thus leading the children to a long, healthy, God-centered lifestyle.

\* To read the Time articles concerning obesity visit:

<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1813700,00.html>

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