



The Obesity Epidemic

by | Matthew McNutt

Somewhere in Idaho there's a kid eating **an entire bag** of Fiery Habanero Doritos. Meanwhile, in Vermont, another kid is eating a **one-pound bag** of Skittles. The tropical ones. Seriously. It happens all the time.

And that, my friends, is why childhood obesity is becoming a huge problem for America. Personally, I blame the Taco Bell Chihuahua. Yeah, he may be gone, but his memory lives on and those burritos pack some serious calories.

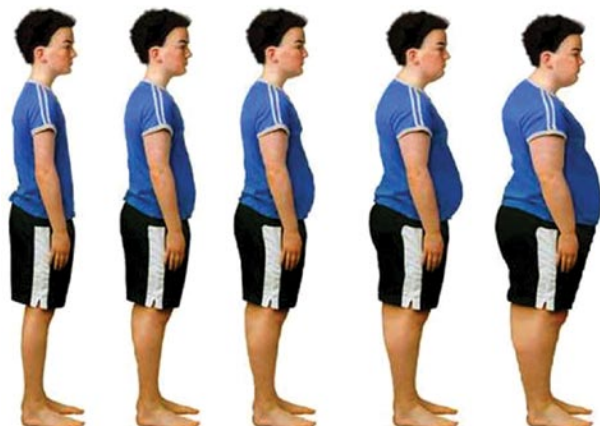
Getting Worse

For several years now, kids' growing waistlines have been almost weekly news items. Schools, government programs, community associations—almost everyone seems to come up with something to do about it. And after millions of dollars of research, new programs, talk about warning labels on junk food, and a couple of emotional commercials...it has gotten worse.

This year, the average middle school student's lifespan is actually shorter than his parents'—specifically because of youth obesity. With more than 30 percent of kids overweight, it's no wonder there are record numbers of children diagnosed with Type-2 Diabetes (what used to be called adult-onset diabetes). Ten times as many kids are diagnosed annually now than two decades ago. According to another study, a quarter of children between the ages of five and 10 are already showing early signs of heart disease.

Both Ends of the Spectrum

Last week I read that the percentage of overweight kids in 2010 is predicted to be 50 percent. Meanwhile, on the other end of the spectrum, eating disorders such as



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anorexia and bulimia are also on the rise among young people. It seems kids with healthy eating habits and self images are definitely in the minority. While our culture worships unhealthy levels of thinness, we as a whole spiral the other way, creating an environment of self-hatred and frustration that's spilling over into all areas of life.

All this to say—I'm getting agitated. People are getting worked up over this issue, and rightfully so. It has become a crisis. Our bad habits are multiplying and the coming generations are being affected—something needs to happen. While the government, the YMCA, and even Miami Heat center Shaquille O'Neal have weighed in, the church has been silent. That's what has me agitated.

The Silent Church

Sure there are tons of Christian diet books for adults. Plenty of church weight-loss groups, conferences, clubs, and more. But healthy eating and exercise habits for young people just don't register among the concerns of the church. Other than a handful of resources on eating disorders and gluttony, the church just doesn't seem to care.

But here's the point: It's not about telling kids what they can't eat or the abomination of gluttony. We're keeping quiet about the joy of worshipping God through how we care for the temple of our bodies. More than any other people on earth, Christians have the full picture when it comes to health. For others, healthy living is usually only about avoiding a host of negative consequences. *But it's so much more than that!*

The Temple is Sacred

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." Do we realize the significance of that passage? The tremendous nature of that revelation? Our body is sacred—the holy dwelling place of the God of the universe!

This passage has become so important to me that I can't begin to fathom it. When you read passage after passage in the Old Testament referring to the temple and begin to see how significant the loving care of the temple played in worship, it's thrilling to realize that all of those revelations from God were to give us an understanding of the significant gift we've been given today—our bodies.

We desperately need to cry out to the coming generations that care for their bodies isn't a painful chore, something to be loathed and complained about. Young people urgently need teaching on the beauty of worship through care of God's holy temple—that regardless of their looks, their shapes, their strength, they must realize their bodies are the holy, sacred dwelling places of God. That's where their self-image needs to be rooted; then healthy eating and activity become a joyful and natural result.

It's past time for the church to get involved in addressing the youth obesity epidemic—and even more, to teach kids that physical health is really high worship of the Almighty. 🙏