

Theme: Stewardship of Body

Warm-Up Activity

1. Have each participant write down what they have eaten for the past 24 hours.
2. Discuss how their eating patterns are/are not good models of nutritious diets.

Scripture

Old Testament

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (KJV)

New Testament

Romans 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (KJV)

Hebrews 12:1-2 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ...” (NRSV)

Case Study

The door slams loudly as Bobby rushes in from another day at school. “I’m starving” he shouts as he grabs a couple of cookies and rummages in the icebox for a soda. “Don’t eat too much; dinner will be ready soon!” yells his mother from the other room. Bobby runs up the steps to his room and turns on his favorite video game. For the next hour he is very quiet and his mother lets out a big sigh of relief. As long as Bobby is playing his video game he won’t be teasing his little sister. Bobby’s mother pops a frozen pizza into the oven to cook while she loads the washing machine with another load of laundry. Both of Bobby’s parents work full-time and every minute is filled with all the chores that are necessary to maintaining a home.

The next day is Saturday and Bobby and his sister will spend the day with their grandparents. Bobby is really looking forward to going to “Grammy’s” house; she always makes his favorite foods---homemade biscuits, macaroni and cheese and chocolate pie for dessert! He likes Grammy’s biscuits so much, that he ate four of them for lunch when he was visiting last week!

But Bobby is seven years old and already weighs 85 pounds. The pediatrician had a long talk with Bobby’s parents during his last office visit. Dr. Brown told them that according to the pediatric growth charts, Bobby’s body mass index (BMI) was above the 95th percentile. The BMI is determined by measuring both the height and weight of the child and then determining where it falls in relation to other children of the same age and gender. A BMI at or above the 95th percentile is considered overweight or obese. Obesity is defined as a generalized accumulation of body fat; a child is considered obese if he/she is significantly over the ideal weight for his/her height. Since talking with the doctor, Bobby’s mother repeatedly tells him not to eat so much. However, Bobby becomes fretful and complains when he doesn’t get the snacks he wants.

The Facts

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003), the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children in the United States has doubled in the last 2 decades and is increasing at an alarming rate. It is estimated that over 15% of children between the ages of 6-19 are at or above the 95th percentile for BMI on standard growth charts. American children and adolescents are also less physically active than those of previous generations. Less active children are more likely to be overweight and also more likely to have higher blood pressure, insulin and cholesterol levels. Medical problems are more common in obese children and adolescents and these can affect cardiovascular health (elevated blood pressure and cholesterol), the endocrine system (type 2 diabetes and menstrual irregularities) and mental health (depression and low self-esteem). Other health problems such as asthma, sleep apnea, orthopedic problems, and gastrointestinal problems are now being seen at an increased rate in obese individuals and have become more common in the pediatric population.

It has long been recognized that overweight tends to “run in families.” It has been found that if a child’s parents are obese during the child’s first three years of life, there is a greater chance of the child being obese when he or she becomes an adult. There are numerous and complicated environmental risk factors for overweight and obesity, including family and parental dynamics. The food choices of the parents also have a great impact on the food choices of the child.

Other environmental factors have also been found to have a significant impact on weight-gain in children. One study found that children who watched 4 or more hours of television per day had significantly greater BMI as compared to those who watched fewer than 2 hours per day. Having a television in the bedroom has been reported to be a strong predictor of becoming overweight, even in pre-school aged children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). Some other factors that may contribute to overweight are:

- Easy availability of food, especially high-calorie snacks
- Parent’s attitudes towards food
- Frequent eating of fast foods
- Using food as a reward
- Lack of exercise
- Snacking while watching TV
- Not knowing how to eat healthy
- Lack of physical activity
- Long periods of watching TV or playing video games
- Most children are driven or bused to school each day & sit for long periods of time because schools have cut physical education programs

The Theological Issue

Why should the faith community be concerned about childhood obesity? “We are in danger of raising the first generation of American children who will live sicker and die younger than the generation before them” (Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., Robert Wood Johnson Foundation). Paul’s message to the Romans is a reminder that our “bodies” are a living sacrifice to God. God has blessed us with remarkable abilities to heal and to grow. We, as followers of Christ, are challenged with being good stewards of all of God’s gifts including the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.

Missions begin at home and like yeast it permeates the world and the lives around us. We are commissioned to go “**into all the world**, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (KJV) and to “**run with perseverance** the race that is set before us.” Part of our role as followers of Christ is to prepare the next generation to carry on the legacy of spreading the Good News. But how will they be able to do so, given the grave predictions associated with childhood obesity?

Suggested Activities for Group Study

Note: Maybe not everyone in your group is a parent but we are all a part of a greater community. Studies have shown that children who live in close-knit neighborhoods where adults provide social support are half as likely to be overweight as other children (<http://www.rand.org/news> , *Obesity in America*). Be sure to encourage all group members and emphasize that they have a role to play in influencing healthier practices into the lives of children.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Proverbs 22:6 suggest about our role in helping children to live healthy lives?
2. Do the New Testament readings for this lesson have anything to do with childhood obesity? If so, how or in what ways?
3. What food groups were missing from the diet described in the story about Bobby?
4. What tips would you give Bobby’s mother in dealing with his food habits?

True/False Exercise

1. A person becomes overweight when they consume more calories than are burned off during activity.
2. A person is at higher risk for health problems associated with being overweight if they have had close relatives with heart disease or diabetes.
3. Being overweight increase the risk of developing other health problems such as cancer.
4. Severely restricting one’s diet is the best way to lose weight

(Answers)

1. True. When a person consumes more calories than they burn, the calories are stored as body fat.
2. True. Heart disease, diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), elevated cholesterol levels are all warning signs of health problems that can occur with obesity.
3. True. Obesity in women has been found to be associated with cancer of the uterus, gallbladder, cervix, ovary, breast and colon. Obesity in men has been associated with cancer of the colon, rectum and prostate gland.
4. False. Severe dietary restriction is not recommended for most people. It is best to discuss any weight loss plan with your physician, nurse practitioner, or dietician. Incorporating healthy behaviors into your daily routine is the key to weight loss.

Involvement:

1. Parents are the most important role models in helping children develop healthy habits; they have much more influence on children's lives than outside forces such as social pressure and advertising.

Here are some suggestions about what families and communities can do to address the issue of childhood obesity:

- Use activities to reward for good behavior instead of food
 - Have specific, regular mealtimes for the family
 - Provide healthy options such as fruit and yogurt for snacks
 - Involve the entire family in developing healthier eating habits, not just the person who is overweight
 - Encourage exercise promoting activities such as riding a bike or skating
 - Most importantly, become a healthy role model for children to follow
2. For your next meeting have each member prepare a nutritious food item to share with the other members.
 3. Start exploring ways that favorite recipes can be made more nutritious such as using low-fat cheese in dishes such as macaroni and cheese. Incorporate these healthy recipes into church suppers and picnics.

Commitment

1. Commit to living a healthier lifestyle as a role-model for others.
2. Encourage family members to commit to healthier lifestyles; consider making a family covenant.
3. Encourage other parents, teachers, coaches and others who influence youth to discuss healthy nutrition and activity habits with children.
4. Enlist policy makers from local, state and national organizations and schools to support a healthful lifestyle for all children.
5. Encourage organizations responsible for health care and health care financing to provide coverage for effective obesity prevention and treatment strategies.

Bibliography:

American Academy of Pediatrics (2003). Prevention of pediatric overweight and obesity.

Pediatrics, 112(2), pp. 424-430.

RAND Corporation (2005). <http://www.rand.org/news>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2005). *Childhood Obesity*. www.rwjf.org

Other Available Resources

1. Resources from New Hope Publishers – www.wmystore.com
or call 1-800-98-701
 - *Live the Call* by Wanda Lee
 - *Intentional Living* by Andrea Mullins
 - *The Mentoring Mom: 11 Ways to Model Christ for Your Child* by Jackie Kendall

- *If God is in Control, Why Do I Have a Headache?* By Debbie Taylor Williams
2. Resources from LifeWay Bookstores – www.lifeway.com
or call 1-800-2-1123
- *Fit 4 Nutrition: Starter Kit*
 - *Fit 4 Fitness: Starter Kit*

If you don't want to invest in the kits there are also individual workbooks and facilitator's guides available

3. Online Resources
- <http://www.dole5aday.com/Grownups> - An informational website designed for adults
 - <http://www.dole5aday.com/kids> - Bright and colorful website that has games, pages to color and valuable information about good nutrition and exercise. Designed for children but also has great resources for adults.
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign> - The VERB Campaign encourages young people ages 9-13 years old to be physically active every day. This site has downloadable educational materials, posters and games. **Information also available in Spanish.**
 - <http://nihseniorhealth.gov> - Contains valuable health information and resources for people age 60 and older
 - <http://medlineplus.gov> - Provides information on a variety of health topics. **Information also available in Spanish.**
 - <http://mypyramid.gov> - Provides a personal eating plan based on age and activity level. Also has other valuable health information. **Information also available in Spanish.**
 - <http://mypyramid.gov/kids/index.html> - Provides games and activities for children. **Information also available in Spanish.**