



## Start early to prevent adult obesity

ARE VIDEO GAMES, computers, and television sentencing today's children to a life of obesity in their adult years? Evidence continues to mount in support of our early years being a critical time to prevent obesity as adults.

**Question:** Why are the childhood years so important for obesity prevention strategies?

**Answer:** Habits learned early in life tend to persist into adulthood. Once excess body fat accumulates, physical activity becomes more difficult, making fat loss more challenging. Another emerging obesity concern is related to the amount and type of muscle tissue developed during the early years.

Researchers Baoping (Beth) Zhao and Jinzeng Yang in the Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences department at the University of Hawaii recently published innovative re-

search indicating that muscle development during childhood may be a major factor preventing obesity and related diseases in adults.

This study, supported by the Hawaii Community Foundation, USDA, and the University of Hawaii, showed that mice with increased muscle development during early growth accumulated much less body fat. This happened even when the well-muscled mice were fed a high fat diet that caused normal mice to get fat. Also, based on their response to insulin, the mice with more muscle showed less predisposition to type 2 diabetes than those with less muscle.

A variety of human studies presented at the recent 2006 American College of Sports Medicine Annual Meeting supported the mouse study conclusions. A major component of the conference focused on life-

long fitness and the importance of starting early in life.

**Q:** How can younger people be helped to avoid adult overweight and obesity?

**A:** Finding a variety of physical activities that children enjoy on a daily basis may be the most important thing to do. Both parents and teachers can provide good examples by staying active themselves.

Ideally, provide kids with opportunities for a variety of enjoyable types of physical activity. Include aerobic activities like jogging, hiking, biking, paddling, or swimming along with activities that build strength and flexibility. Key concepts to think about are variety, moderation, and especially fun. If the activities are not "recreation," children are unlikely to keep them as part of their lifestyle as they make the transition to adulthood.

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