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Adolescent Obesity

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.05.05
by Lynn S. Marmitt

It is the 1990s, and “thin is still in.” Messages in advertising emphasize paying close attention to body image, limiting fat intake, cutting calories and exercising. Yet, with all the focus on maintaining a healthy body there still exists a considerable number of individuals who are either overweight or obese. I have been amazed and concerned by the fact that so many of my students are considerably overweight. I see the students fill up and enjoy a sugar-packed breakfast and a rich carbohydrate lunch. Snacks consist of candy, gum, cookies, soda and chips. Outside of the school environment, fast-food establishments attract the adolescent population. McDonalds, Burger King and Wendys, to name a few, offer a quick, calorie laden meal containing enough fat to fulfill an entire day’s allotment.

An increased appetite is normal during adolescence and food sometimes becomes a passion. Some adolescents are concerned about their body image, dieting and exercising relentlessly. Others rely on food as an emotional outlet. Obesity is a common eating disorder associated with adolescence. Obesity can weaken physical health and well-being and can shorten life expectancy. The condition can lead to social disabilities and unhappiness which may cause stress and even mental illness.

The physiological and psychological factors influencing obesity will be discussed in the first section of this unit. The second section of the unit addresses the social and health factors associated with obesity. The final section includes student activities on nutritional needs, planning a balanced diet and exercise program and deciphering food labels. The unit was developed for students in grades five through eight to complement the study of the human body and health issues. The unit should take approximately three weeks to complete.

(Recommended for Science and Health, grades 5-8)

Key Words

Adolescence American Nutrition Disorders Sexuality AIDS Education

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