

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Could your child have the arteries of a 45 year old?

Yes, they could, according to a recent study presented at a meeting of the American Heart Association. Using ultrasound imaging, doctors found that the carotid arteries in the necks of teenagers and children as young as 10 had fatty buildup and signs of other cardiovascular disease risk similar to that of an average 45-year-old.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, the problem is widespread. The number of overweight children has more than doubled and the number of overweight adolescents has tripled since 1980. Most experts consider children in the 85th percentile and above for weight for their age as being overweight.

According to Dr. Andrew Weil, renowned author and director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine of The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center, “The consequences of the typical American diet on our children are devastating. Weight gain is just the visible tip of the iceberg. They are increasing their risk of chronic diseases later in life, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, autoimmune diseases, and even cancer.”

Many parents consider the typical high saturated fat, high refined sugar diet as a child’s rite of passage. After all, if they can’t eat this when they’re kids, when *can* they enjoy such indulgences? Or so the thinking goes. However, science has demonstrated that many serious diseases evolve from habits that started in childhood.

In addition to the health consequences – both short- and long-term – of a poor diet, there are the emotional and psychological ramifications of childhood obesity, says Dr. Sandy Newmark, integrative pediatrician and a faculty member of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. “Overweight children are often subjected to teasing, even bullying, by their peers. Also, research indicates that an unhealthy diet can make concentration more difficult and contribute to behavioral problems at home and in school.”

What’s a concerned parent to do? It’s important to identify kids at risk for metabolic disease, checking for insulin resistance, diabetes and elevated triglycerides, says Weil. If there is a family history of any of these conditions, Weil suggests children be evaluated by the age of five. If there is no family history, and if a child’s weight is in the normal range, baseline testing should take place by the age of 10.

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Parents often make mealtime concessions, catering to taste but depriving their children of nutritional benefit. According to renowned chef and author Rick Bayless, “Our society literally segregates children at the dinner table. We have one meal for adults and “kids food” for the children, which is often much higher in saturated fat, refined sugar and sodium. Families should sit down to one nutritious meal that appeals to the entire family.” Bayless offers the following tips to help families enjoy healthy meals together:

- Add grated vegetables to the main course.
- Make your own pizza! Substitute whole wheat crust for a standard crust, add low fat cheese and sliced vegetables.
- Introduce one new main course each week. Try meat substitutes such as whole soy, tempeh, seitan or tofu.
- Let children help with the shopping. Give them a list of healthy foods and tell them to pick three of their favorites from the list.
- Get kids cooking. Help them discover the joy of finding and trying new recipes. Let them be adventurous. If they think organic peanut butter and shredded lettuce is a gourmet treat, buy into their experiment.
- Offer low fat milk, water or fortified soy beverages instead of soda pop or juice

Dr. Weil and Rick Bayless will be speaking about childhood obesity and the role of nutrition in optimal health at the 6th Annual Nutrition and Health Conference: State of the Science and Clinical Applications, to be held May 10 – 13, at the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile Hotel, 540 N. Michigan Avenue. The forum on May 10 is open to the public. For additional information, visit www.nutritionandhealthconf.org.

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About the Nutrition and Health Conference

Nutrition and Health: State of the Science and Clinical Applications is the premier nutrition conference for health professionals in the U.S. Co-presented by the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, the conference, to be held May 10-13 in Chicago, assembles internationally-recognized researchers, clinicians, educators, and chefs, all of whose work focuses on the interface between nutrition and healthful living. A public forum on May 10 featuring Dr. David Katz, Dr. Andrew Weil and chef and restaurateur Rick Bayless will focus on family health. For more information visit www.nutritionandhealthconf.org

About AzCIM

The mission of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine is to lead the transformation of healthcare by creating, educating and actively supporting a community of professionals who embody the philosophy and practice of integrative medicine. Integrative medicine is healing-oriented and takes account of body, mind, spirit and lifestyle, making use of conventional and alternative therapies as appropriate. Since its inception, the Arizona Center in Integrative Medicine has focused its efforts on three domains: education, clinical care, and research - with the primary emphasis on education. To learn more about the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine visit its Web site at www.integrativemedicine.arizona.edu.