

**The Examiner**  
**Fighting Childhood Obesity with Healthy Eating and Exercise**  
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A recent report from the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council suggests several green solutions to the growing problem with childhood obesity. Local jurisdictions can play an instrumental role in the fight against childhood obesity by encouraging environments that make promote healthier diets and more movement/exercise, said a committee of health experts. The increase in childhood obesity and the costs associated with obesity underscore the urgency for prevention efforts at the community level. In the past 35 years -- less than half a lifetime -- American adolescents who are obese has over tripled, rising from 5% to nearly 18%.

With such a high percentage of children and adolescents between the ages of two and 19 obese, the prevalence is so high that it could reduce the life expectancy of today's generation of children and diminish the overall quality of their lives. Local governments have an opportunity to play a critical role in making it easier for children to eat healthy diets and move more. The 2009 report *Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity* presents a menu of suggested action steps for local government officials to weigh in their efforts to prevent childhood obesity in their locality.

The report cites 10 examples of local efforts to promote healthy eating and physical activity. They range from a comprehensive obesity prevention initiative -- involving walking trails, a new fitness center, and breastfeeding promotion -- to a city law requiring calorie information on restaurant menus, to a fitness index that helps organizations monitor their progress in meeting dietary and fitness goals.

**In their 2006 report, *The Future of Children*, Sallis and Glanz suggested clear policy implications.** People who have access to safe places to be active, neighborhoods that are walkable, and local markets that offer healthy food choices are likely to be more active and to eat more healthful food—two behaviors that can lead to good health and may help avoid obesity. Increasing the number of healthful, affordable food choices in a variety of food outlets is a complementary strategy that may be largely driven by commercial considerations. In this instance, public pressure and consumer demand can make a difference. Researchers may not find a single “smoking gun.” It is more likely that many built environment variables will show a strong cumulative effect on diet, physical activity, and weight status in children.

Unfortunately, Cleveland and its surrounding areas are not the most bike/walking/nutrition friendly areas. It will require vigilance on the part of the parent to find the best ways to incorporate this into a lifestyle. The local STEPs program is a good sign of work in progress.

Since 1990, the federal government has made transportation funds available for pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure. This provides an opportunity for an activist parent to encourage sidewalks, trails, traffic calming, and crosswalks. Safe Routes to Schools construction funding is available from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Organized advocacy, however, may be

needed to shift priorities within transportation departments to ensure adequate funding of pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

In June, the Cleveland Clinic Foundation received a \$25,000 grant towards their Childhood Obesity Prevention Program. It will address the crucial need for school-based programs to target childhood obesity. The hospital plans to work with a local elementary school in a pilot project to provide access to nutritious food in school cafeterias, increase opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day and create a healthier environment necessary for a child's overall wellbeing. In addition, the program will conduct research on the outcomes and quality of its efforts and create a toolkit of successful interventions for program replication in other communities.

With a degree of vigilance, our children can walk and eat their way to a healthier life, free from obesity and all the issues surrounding it. We as parents only need to be aware.