

Obesity is a rapidly growing problem in our youth. The standard American diet (SAD) is less nutritious and more fattening than ever before in the history of this country. It is in large part the reason that the life span of our children is likely to be shorter than the life span of any generation previously.

Although the food consumed by our children is mostly reflective of the food available at home and that which is allowed to be eaten at restaurants, the food available at school is also a factor. Recently a few schools in Philadelphia made efforts to make their foods healthier.

These schools reduced the available high carb snacks and eliminated candy and soda. They also emphasized good nutrition in their educational programs. The result of this rather modest effort was that in the two years of this experiment, half the number of kids became overweight compared to other schools that did not make similar efforts.

In the schools that adopted the more nutritious food choices, the overall number of overweight students dropped up to 15 percent. In the schools that didn't make these changes the number of overweight kids increased by 20 percent.

Healthy diets consist primarily of fruits and vegetables with some meat and grains as a compliment. Healthy diets are low in carbohydrates which means low in pasta, breads and sugar. Generally the less processed the food, the more healthy it is.

Unfortunately, processed foods keep better, are more affordable and are easier to prepare than fresh foods. Sweetened foods are also relatively inexpensive and desired by our kids. As a result, it is difficult to provide the healthiest options to our school children.

Even still, some simple changes can be made. The simplest is providing water to drink instead of sugar sweetened drinks such as chocolate milk, soda, and sweet tea. Replacing low nutrition foods such as macaroni and cheese with another serving of vegetables would be another simple change that can have a significant impact over time.

If we are to reverse the growing epidemic of diabetes and other diet related diseases, we must begin to make the types of changes instituted by the schools in Philadelphia. The future health of our kids depends upon it.