



Let's Move! to End Childhood Obesity

By Michelle Obama

It wasn't that long ago that most children in America led reasonably active lives. When I was growing up, my brother and I walked to school, ran around at recess and in gym, and spent evenings playing outside. When mom called us in for dinner, we ate what she made, no questions asked: vegetables were a given and dessert a special treat.

This might sound like nostalgia, but for most of us, it was reality.

Times have changed: the world has sped up, parents and children keep juggling more and more, and too many good habits have given way to bad ones. Fresh fruits and vegetables are often hard to afford. Evenings outside have been replaced by whole nights inside playing video games. Many parents just don't have the time to make those home-cooked meals.

I have seen this change firsthand. It wasn't that long ago that I was a working mom, struggling to balance meetings and deadlines with soccer, ballet, and events at school. Some nights, when everyone in the house was tired and hungry, I'd just head to the drive-thru.

But these small changes have created a big problem. Childhood obesity rates have tripled in the last three decades. Almost one in three children are considered overweight or obese. Pediatricians are now treating children for adult diseases like type II diabetes and hypertension.

We all want the best for our children. We want them to succeed in school, fulfill their dreams, and take this country to new heights. To get them there, we know they need plenty of healthy food and exercise to help get them ready to learn. But as parents, we all know that's often easier said than done.

That is why last year, we launched *Let's Move!*, a nationwide initiative with a simple goal: to end childhood obesity within a generation. To achieve that goal, we're working with people from every sector of our society—concerned parents and individuals across this country, businesses and elected officials, faith leaders and educators, doctors and athletes.

We launched *Let's Move! Childcare* and created a checklist for parents and providers to ensure our youngest children get off to a healthy start. Hundreds of mayors and local officials—from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine—have pledged to make their communities healthier through *Let's Move! Cities, Towns, and Counties*. We teamed up with celebrities like NFL quarterback Drew Brees, Beyoncé, and Elmo to encourage and inspire children to stay active. We partnered with major retailers to cut prices on healthy items like fresh fruits and vegetables and ensure that every community has access to a grocery store with fresh food.



We also know that our efforts have to focus on the place where many of our children get more than half their calories and spend half their day: our schools. That's why we've made schools a centerpiece of the *Let's Move!* initiative.

We worked with Congress to pass the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010, which will get healthier food to millions of school children. We're working to get an additional 3 million children eating school breakfasts by 2015. We are also supporting efforts to put salad bars in 6,000 schools. We have seen more than 700 professional chefs team up with local schools to develop healthier menus and teach children the joys of preparing and eating healthy foods. We also expanded the President's Physical Fitness Challenge and the Presidential Active Lifestyle Awards to recognize children who get the recommended 60 minutes of exercise a day.

We have made significant progress, but we have so much more to do. We need your help, because we know that ensuring that children eat right and stay active is ultimately the responsibility of parents.

For 115 years, PTAs have been fighting for our children and their futures. As PTA members, you are leaders in our schools and communities. When you talk, others listen.

Take Aaron Marks, a father from Decatur, Georgia. He was not happy when he found out that at school his four-year-old son was eating pizza for breakfast and cookies for a snack. So he teamed up with his PTA and did something about it. He helped raise money to start a community garden and took a trip to the supermarket with the preschool's director to come up with a new list of snacks.

This is just one example of the impact that parents can have. You can ask your children what they are eating, both in the lunchroom and when they are out with their friends. You can talk to the principal and



school board about participating in the Healthier US Schools Challenge (www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html), a competition that rewards schools that serve healthy food and ensures students get adequate exercise. And you can go to Letsmove.gov for more ideas about how to get involved in fostering healthy lifestyles in your community, like planting a school garden or finding a local chef to team up with your school.

Every little bit counts.

This school year, with your help, we will continue the work of *Let's Move!* to give our children all the energy, strength, and opportunities they need to fulfill every last bit of their potential. As parents, we want nothing less for our children. As Americans, we need nothing less for our country. **OC**

First Lady Michelle Obama supports healthy lifestyles for children and families and is working with Dr. Jill Biden to offer military families the opportunities and support they have earned through their Joining Forces initiative.