

# Skipping (Jump Rope) And Childhood Obesity

## Skipping Benefits - Childhood Obesity

When I first qualified as a personal trainer and fitness instructor 15 years ago there was very little in the public arena about what is now the seemingly national and international problem (in certain countries) of childhood obesity. So what is it that has changed so dramatically in the lives of children and what can be done about it? Quite clearly there are many factors to the problem and likewise many aspects to the solution. I am going to focus mainly on the physical aspects of the problem as the purposes of this document as it is through physical activity that I believe an extremely important part the solution can be found.

What is the problem of childhood obesity exactly?

This is an excerpt from the UK government paper Tackling Child Obesity-First Steps Produced December 2006 *Obesity is a serious health condition. It is defined as carrying too much body fat for your height and sex. A person is considered obese if they have a body mass index or BMI (weight in kilograms divided by the square of their height in metres) of 30 or greater. Obesity is a causal factor in a number of chronic diseases and conditions including high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and, overall, it reduces life expectancy by an average of nine years. There has been a steady rise in the number of children aged 2-10 who are obese-from 9.9% in 1995 to 13.4% in 2004. Such children are more likely to be obese adults.*

This of course is not just a problem in the UK. *'Childhood obesity around the world will almost double by 2010'*. This from a report by International Association for the Study of Obesity which also says *' things will only get worse if people don't change the way they live and eat.'*

Figures published in the International Journal of Paediatric Obesity show that *in the European Union by the end of the decade thirty eight per cent of children will be overweight while in North and South America the number will be almost fifty per cent. This trend will be seen in other regions too - the Middle East, across Asia and the Pacific. Many developing countries are now struggling to fight a double burden of disease - those that still haven't overcome malnutrition may also have to treat people for illnesses caused by them being overweight. Heart disease, diabetes as well as liver disorders and high cholesterol are just some of the problems that are becoming more common and without significant changes in lifestyle and diet the authors of the report say the situation will only get worse.'*

Looking once more to the UK, One in 10 six-year-olds is now obese and the total number of obese children has now more than doubled since 1982 and the question facing us is how serious a problem is this as if this trend continues half of all children in the UK will be obese in 2020!

The main problem is that if a child becomes obese even though they experience few serious health problems as children they are storing problems up for their future adult life. Some of the body processes in obese children can change and some of these changes are difficult to reverse in adult life and some are irreversible. Fat storage cells, adipocytes, within the bodies of children are created in the first few years of life if these cells are filled up quickly, more adipocytes will be created until an

obese child can have up to three times as many as a normal child. The adipocytes will stop multiplying and at this point the child will have the same amount for the rest of their life. The adipocytes then simply expand or retract as they store more or less fat. This makes it harder for the adult that was obese as a child to lose weight with good nutrition and exercise as the body tries to store fat in proportion to the amount of adipocytes.

Another worrying trend is the increase of type II diabetes that is now appearing in children and young adults, something that usually does not occur until later in life. Type II diabetes once presented is incurable and will mean a lifetime of controlling blood sugar levels with the increased risk of complications that can occur such as heart disease, kidney disease and blindness.

Another issue can be low self esteem or even depression in children due to a negative body image. This in turn can lead to listlessness and lack of physical activity which exacerbates the problem. So why has this problem emerged and what is so different now compared to just 15 years ago? The BMA (British Medical Association) produced a report in June 2005 called Preventing childhood obesity and in it they suggest the following

*there are a number of explanations for the observation that children today may be more inactive than those of previous generations. These include the increased use of cars, the reduction in likelihood that children can 'play outside' (for safety reasons) and the increase in more sedentary activities such as playing computer games and watching television.*

and from the same source -

*The prevalence of activity (at least 60 minutes of activity on all seven days prior to the survey\*) and inactivity (less than 30 minutes of activity) in children. It should be emphasised that although two thirds of children (2-11 year olds) are meeting the government's requirement of at least 60 minutes of moderate activity per day, this means that one third are not. \*Source: Health Survey for England, 2002*

Physical activity as a solution.

The first thing to make clear is that obesity is a complex issue and I would emphasise again that many factors including good nutrition will influence the solution. However regarding physical activity the BMA report Preventing childhood obesity states.

*Physical activity is essential for good health at all ages. As a key determinant of energy expenditure, physical activity is fundamental to energy balance and weight control. It has a range of benefits during childhood, including healthy growth and development, maintenance of energy balance, psychological wellbeing, social interaction and reduction of risk factors such as hypertension and high cholesterol. Unfortunately, there is relatively little direct evidence (compared with adults) linking physical inactivity in children with childhood health outcomes. Physical activity is important for bone health and development. Exercises that produce physical stresses on the bones during the years of the growth spurt can help to increase bone mineral density and protect against osteoporosis in later life. Children may engage in physical activity through play and recreation, which further enhances their social and mental growth as well as their physical growth.*

Skipping as a solution.

There are many reasons why skipping is of particularly benefit as a great physical activity for fighting childhood obesity;

- 1. Longevity** - because it really is great fun - Skipping is not something you have to force on children, for most simply teach them the basic skipping techniques show them the cool skipping tricks and skipping games that can be learnt and watch them flourish!
- 2. Low cost** - either for an individual or an institution there is a minimum requirement forequipment or facilities. A skipping rope and some space indoors or out.
- 3. Versatility** - skipping can be used as a warm up for other activities. Skipping can be an individual or social activity. Skipping can be a great fun as School P.E. Lessons or in after school clubs. Skipping is great a playground activity. Skipping can be practiced at home. The fun of Skipping can be shared with teachers, mum and dad, brothers and sisters.
- 4. Instant reward** - from the first 5 minutes there is fun to be had and goals to achieve and all the while the benefits of physical activity.
- 5. Aspiration** - once children understand the abundance of skipping rhymes, games and tricks to be learnt which are very cool in themselves and also the skipping awards and records that can be achieved. Many will want to go on to develop their new found skills.

For these reasons we at skip-hop with our skipping workshops for children have found that by using skipping it is possible to get children away from computer games and sedentary lifestyles and involved in a physical activity that they themselves will want to be involved in. With the many smaller goals and achievements that can be made on the way to becoming good at skipping children can develop higher levels of self esteem.

How can you jump higher