

# New Perspectives on Childhood Obesity

Knowledge is key in the fight against this major health threat

BY KIM GOSS, MS

**F**itness icon Jack LaLanne was best known for his television show, *The Jack LaLanne Show*, which debuted in 1951. Jack was lean, well-muscled and charismatic; his show was so popular that it went into syndication and aired until 1985. In the show's audience-participation format, LaLanne led viewers through simple callisthenic exercises. LaLanne's show also included segments in which he explained his philosophy of eating well and exercising properly to stay healthy and lean. The show inspired millions of people, including Richard Simmons.

When Simmons was a teenager, he weighed over 200 pounds, and he says his mother, Shirley, would exercise in front of the television with LaLanne and encourage young Richard to do the same. Simmons went on to regard LaLanne as a role model, and in his own unique way Simmons sought to follow LaLanne's career path as a leader in the fitness community. And like LaLanne, Simmons preaches the same message: eat well and exercise, and you will stay healthy and lean.

For LaLanne and Simmons, the problem of obesity has a simple solution: eat healthy and exercise more. For some, this solution works – but for

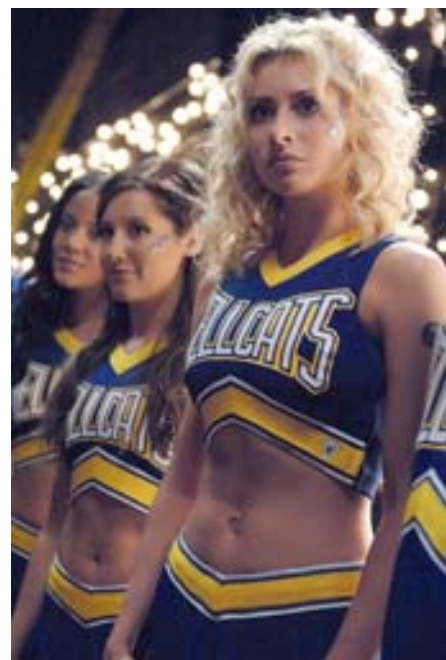
others, it's not that simple. Especially for today's young people.

## Defining the Problem

A simple working definition of obesity is that it is an accumulation of excess fat in the body that can reduce life expectancy and increase the risk of developing health problems.

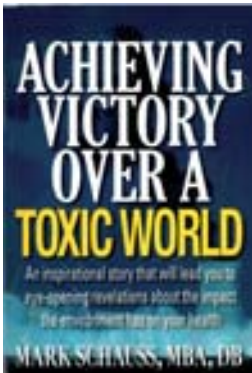
Another definition is being 20 percent over one's ideal bodyweight, which translates into about 25 percent bodyfat for men and 30 percent for women. There is also a method of determining ideal weight by what is known as the body mass index (BMI). This number is acquired by dividing an individual's mass by the square of their height, represented by the equation  $BMI = \text{kilogram/meters}^2$ . This provides for the following classifications: underweight (<18.5), normal weight (18.5-24.9), overweight (25.0-29.9), class I obesity (30.0-34.9), class II obesity (35.0-39.9), and class III obesity ( $\geq 40.0$ ).

Many estimates of overweight and obesity are available, depending upon which sources are used and how the data are analyzed, but for children today the common numbers we hear are that 25 percent of children in the US are overweight and



Many cheerleaders struggle to stay exceptionally lean, but the average young woman and young man struggle to maintain even a healthy bodyweight. Shown left to right from *Hellcats*, a CW television show about cheerleading, are Heather Hemmens, Ashley Tisdale and Alyson Michalka.

of those 11 percent are obese. These percentages continue to increase, and medical experts predict that two thirds of overweight children will become overweight in adulthood. It may surprise you to learn that one reason for the increase in overweight and obesity is toxins.



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## Waste Going to Waists

For the past 28 years Mark Schauss, MBA, DB, has been studying medical research concerning the effects of toxins on our health and has written a book on the subject: *Achieving Victory over a Toxic World*. Schauss believes that excessive exposure to toxins is one reason that obesity rates among all Americans continues to escalate.

What is a toxin? “In simple terms, it occurs when something from the outside gets into our system that our bodies view as being foreign and causes negative effects,” says Schauss. “But for each person it’s different; for instance, caffeine can be extremely toxic for some people because their bodies don’t know how to metabolize it.” He adds that the average American is exposed to about 80,000 chemicals, “and for most of these chemicals we have no idea what they do to the human body.”

In 2002, the US Environmental Protection Agency estimated that over 7.1 billion pounds of 650 different chemicals, 266 of which are linked to birth defects, had been released into the air or water. Says Schauss, “In a study by an environmental group on people not working in industry, such as teachers and journalists, the researchers found that the blood of the subjects contained nearly 100 chemicals that did not exist 40 years ago.”

This is all bad news, but what is the connection between toxins and obesity? First, toxins cool us down.

According to Schauss, when laboratory rats are exposed to toxins, their metabolism (the rate at which the body burns calories) and internal temperature drops. This idea was supported by a paper published in the July 2004 issue of the *International Journal of Obesity*. In fact, Schauss says that there is debate in the American Medical Association about dropping the average healthy body temperature from 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit to 98.0 degrees. Schauss says that the idea is being discussed not because 98 degrees is supposed to be healthier but because fewer patients had a temperature of 98.6 during doctor’s visits. He says that this type of hypothermia may be a protective response to reduce the effects of toxins, and that using drugs to raise body temperature may do more harm than good.

Schauss explains in detail in his book how toxins can promote obesity, such as by interfering with the body’s ability to produce energy from

carbohydrates and by impairing the endocrine system. And these bad effects happen even before birth! “Researchers are finding that there has been an alarming increase in the number of obese, breast-fed babies,” says Schauss. “This is not just a question of kids eating poorly.”

Another way toxins promote obesity is by altering hormonal balance. Although both testosterone and estrogen are present in both males and females, estrogen is considered the female hormone and testosterone the male hormone. One common effect of toxins is that it increases the amount of estrogen in females and lowers the amount of testosterone in males, which, in either case, serves to make it difficult to lose fat once it is acquired.

Schauss says excess estrogen is especially harmful to young women. “It is very well documented that a lot of these chemicals are hormonally distributive and will stimulate an earlier onset of puberty. I went to school in the ’60s, and the girls in elementary school didn’t develop breasts that young; at the turn of the century girls could not get pregnant until they were 16. I was talking to a psychologist who told me that he had seen a number of girls who were as young as nine years old who had become pregnant – and as shocking as it may sound, it’s possible that some girls can become pregnant as early as age seven or eight. This is extremely disturbing, because these girls are unable to handle pregnancy either physiologically or mentally.”



Charles Poliquin’s BioSignature Modulation is a noninvasive method that shows how an individual’s hormonal profile can affect bodyfat stores. The triceps skinfold, measured here by Coach Poliquin, indicates how much testosterone you are currently producing.

## Testing and Treatment

Laboratory testing of hair, stool, urine and blood is a way to determine what toxins are in the body. One non-invasive method to determine where toxins are affecting fat stores is called BioSignature Modulation. It was created by Canadian strength coach Charles Poliquin.

The theory of BioSignature Modulation is that many individuals have stubborn problem areas due to imbalances in their body biochemistry, especially with hormones. Doubt the power of hormones? Just look at what steroids have done to so many athletes, turning men into supermen and women into superwomen (and sometimes into supermen – unfortunately, these drugs do have side effects). And just as steroid hormones can build muscle, other hormones can cause unwanted fat stores in your back, legs, hips and – well, you get the idea.

Here's how BioSignature works. There are 12 major bodyfat sites that can be quickly and accurately tested by a pair of quality skin calipers. Although there are many other methods to test bodyfat, such as underwater weighing and electrical impedance, research shows that bodyfat testing with skin calipers is the most accurate method. It's also the only method that can be successfully used for BioSignature Modulation because it can determine precisely the amount of fat in each of the major fat-testing sites.

Measurements from each site are entered into a software program. The program calculates overall bodyfat and also identifies which areas of the body have excessive levels of fat relative to the other 11 bodyfat sites. Some individuals may have excessive fat in just one area, while others may have several problem areas. Although most of us already have a good idea of what our problem areas are, and experienced practitioners in BioSignature Modulation can often make



In just six weeks, Brooks reduced his bodyfat from 15.35 percent to 8.69 percent and added 22 pounds of muscle

Former NFL player Ethan Brooks, who was featured on the cover of the Spring 2003 issue of BFS, experienced dramatic changes in body composition using BioSignature Modulation.

an accurate visual determination of the problem areas, the calipers are quick, easy and reliable.

Once the BioSignature sites are analyzed, the next step is to set out a specific protocol of diet, exercise and supplementation to resolve the problem. Let's say that the testing reveals you have an excessive amount of fat on your lower thighs (again, relative to your other major fat sites). This "fat imbalance" suggests that there is a problem with your estrogen levels. If your problem area is the triceps, the problem is with your androgen levels. If your problem area is the lower back, the problem is with your insulin levels.

Poliquin is able to identify which hormones are causing the fat imbalance in individuals and then prescribe the appropriate diet, supplement and exercise regimens to restore the hormonal balance so that people can achieve their figure or physique goals. Many of the solutions are easy to implement and require minor adaptations, such as eating more frequently or adopting better sleep habits. And part of this treatment is eliminating toxins from the body.

Schauss says that, ideally, an individual should get lab tests to see what toxins are in the body. It also means

that before a woman gets pregnant, she needs to rid her body of toxins to reduce the risk of her child becoming obese as an infant. The first step, obviously, is to reduce one's exposure to toxins.

For example, do not heat or microwave anything stored in or covered with plastic, wait two days before wearing clothes that were dry cleaned, don't use aerosol sprays, don't use air fresheners (Schauss says the one called "new car smell" contains a chemical that has the highest correlation to developing autism) and never let a plastic water bottle get hot. After that, the next step would be to invest in some natural supplements used in detoxing, including glycine, vitamin C, selenium and N-acetyl-cysteine. Many more suggestions are covered in Schauss's book.

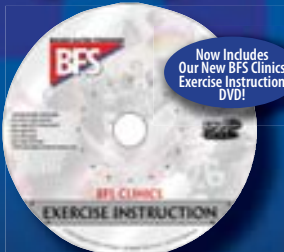
Although this discussion may seem a bit overwhelming and scary, the fact is we are living in a toxic world – the increase in obesity, especially childhood obesity, is proof of that. While fitness celebrities such as Jack LaLanne and Richard Simmons have done much good to fight obesity in this country, we need to look carefully at the influence of toxins in dealing with America's expanding waistlines. BFS



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