



Review of **Our Overweight Children**

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Our Overweight Children: What Parents, Schools, and Communities Can Do to Control the Fatness Epidemic. Dalton Sharron, 2004. University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94704, (510) 642-4247, **paperback**, 292 pp, \$14.95, ISBN 0-520-22574-0. UCpress.edu

Obesity in children is documented, explained, illustrated, and combated in this user's manual. Although written primarily for families, it is applicable to health care professionals and the community. A call for moderation and prevention accompanies a detailed discussion of obesity in children, how weight gain is fostered in our world, and proposed solutions involving families, school, government, and communities.

"I want to hear something new... tell us something that actually brings results," the woman challenged Sharron Dalton. The New York University associate professor answers this cry for help with a 3-part description of (1) the growing epidemic and children most at risk; (2) the myriad of causes: genetic, at home, and in society; and (3) the ways in which families, schools, and communities can combat and finally reverse our fast-growing epidemic of obesity in children and adolescents.

Although the first aim of the book is to lead families into preventive behaviors, chapters on measurement and perception of weight, the contributions of genetics, parenting, and "the toxic environment" provide health professionals with everyday illustrations and footnoted references. The author offers step-by-step guidelines to parents, schools, industry, government, and community. She also provides her opinion, which is well based in her experience as a teacher, parent, Fulbright scholar, and volunteer in Asia.

The reader is given ample cause for respect and understanding of a "fat" child's plight. Quotations from children and numerous characters from preteen and teen fiction provide snapshots of boys' and girls' views of themselves and the usual rejection by their classmates. The author suggests books that can assist families in discussion about overweight children or help children understand their classmates' (or their own) situations. In addition, some strong, positive role models are presented.

The book also reviews weight control programs for children. Although none are endorsed, a helpful description of each allows the reader to investigate those that may best fit individual needs. All programs described for children and youth require a strong family commitment. This book makes it clear that successful reversal of escalating obesity must be realistic for families and must be a result of efforts similar to the successful community-wide reduction of tobacco use.

Hearts N' Parks, Go Girls! and Just for Kids are heralded as cooperative physical activity projects, sponsored by community organizations, staffed by professionals or trained volunteers, and held in community facilities. Planning for active communities and making outdoor play, walking, and biking safer are vital in the synergistic effort to improve health and achieve healthy-weight children.

The book is an easily read textbook, a quick reference guide to aspects of the obesity issue, and a straightforward handbook of suggestions specific to each group held responsible for children's health. Boxed information and suggestions highlight practical information, and the summaries of each chapter are succinct. The reader is directed to current references, covering each topic comprehensively. It is a basic "must-read" for families, health professionals, and community leaders.

All groups committed to improving the health of our children can find both background information and directions for action in *Our Overweight Children*.

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