



Uh oh, American kids are getting fatter! At no time in history have American children been more overweight. In fact, the Surgeon General recently ranked childhood obesity as one of the primary public health concerns in the United States.

There are many reasons that contribute to the rise in childhood obesity and the number of overweight children. Among these include eating at fast food restaurants, eating more processed packaged easy meals, reduction in school physical education classes, an increase in television watching (with 100's of channels to choose from), and more sedentary activities such as video games and internet chatting and talking to friends on "myspace.com".

This article will focus on "tweens"; those children aged 10-13. This is a very difficult time for a child to realize that he or she is overweight, and for many parents this may be the first time that we actually acknowledge our child may be overweight. Up until the age of 10 most of us are convinced our child will "outgrow" their baby fat.

For most "tweens" the physical consequences of being overweight are the least of their concerns. More relevant to the overweight "tween" is the teasing, taunting, and social rejection and isolation that they suffer at school and community events. Too often, the "tween" may begin to internalize the way others see them and the result is low self-esteem. Unfortunately, this may lead to depression as a result of preoccupation with being overweight.

If your "tween" is overweight, it is time for the whole family to get moving. Research shows parents that choose to value fitness and health as a family goal are much more likely to instill these values in their children. Children and adults should be engaging in vigorous exercise and play for at least an hour everyday. Simple lifestyle changes may include taking a family walk each evening after dinner, riding bikes together, walking the dog, shooting hoops together, or taking a hike.

Clarksville and Fort Campbell have an abundance of parks and trails to explore! A favorite in town is the Dunbar Cave Trail, a loop trail that has great inclines and is shady and cool in the summer time and is a favorite with families right after work as a way to unwind from the day! Another great walking place is the Riverfront area, where you can

walk all along the Cumberland River; it is paved so your kids may even want to ride their bikes or rollerblade. If you haven't had the opportunity to explore Rotary Park, you are in for a delightful treat, the park has a series of trails and a great stream perfect for rock hopping and looking for crawdads.

Once you have your "tween" moving, encourage them to use the internet to increase their knowledge on health and nutrition. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has two great websites for "tweens". The first website called "Powerful Bones, Powerful Girls" focuses on girls and nutrition to build strong bones and healthy bodies; you can access this website at [www.cdc.gov/powerfulbones/](http://www.cdc.gov/powerfulbones/). Another great website by the CDC called BAM (Body and Mind) focuses on getting active and building courage and self-esteem to try new sports and activities; you can access this website at [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov).

Go out and play Fort Campbell!

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