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FACTS ABOUT OBESITY

Do you ever find yourself defending your child's weight? Whether to friends, family, or even in your own mind? Do you often find yourself saying/thinking, 'It's just puppy fat / They're big-boned / They'll grow out of it / They take after me'?

If so, then this book may be for you.

There's been a lot of reports in the media lately about childhood obesity and none of it is positive. The papers and news reporters repeatedly tell us that obesity in children is on the rise. That children are at risk of serious diseases if they do not lose their excess weight.

Well. Is it true?

Yes. It is.

So it's all very well to tell us about a problem, to educate us about a problem, but what can we actually do about it, if we have a child that is overweight or obese?

This book will help you, as a parent, help your child in making informed choices about the food they eat, being active and have the motivation to keep going. Because losing weight is not easy. Especially if you're used to being

allowed to eat what you want, when you want. Especially if the child uses food to medicate themselves when they're feeling down or depressed.

But this isn't going to be a programme just for your child. It's going to be for the whole family as a unit. And this is why:

FACT ONE : Many overweight children, have overweight parents

Let's look at this fact. It will not be true in *every single case*, but it seems to be true in the *majority* of cases. If a child, who is overweight, has overweight parents, then that child does not have good role models when it comes to food. Overweight parents will be eating too much of the wrong foods. Fatty, salty, calorie-laden foods. They may snack often, eat at the wrong times of day, drink lots of fizzy drinks or alcohol and serve huge portions because their child 'is a growing lad/girl'. These overweight parents will most probably be inactive. They won't exercise. They may order take-out and not eat fresh fruits or vegetables. Would it be any wonder their child is overweight too?

FACT TWO: Overweight/obese children usually become obese adults

Why? Well it only takes a moment to create a bad habit and sometimes years to break one. A child who has grown up in a home where they can eat unhealthy foods, have large

portions, do no exercise and drink lots of pop and *do_not have* informed parents who want to help their child, will continue to grow up through adolescence into adulthood without being able to change. They get into a vicious cycle. By the time they've realised that they're overweight and their friends at school are making jokes and not wanting to pick them for a sports team, they know nothing better than to go home and make themselves feel better by eating chocolate or a packet of biscuits. They have no-one to motivate them to feel better about themselves or how to change, so this child grows up into an adult who either stays overweight and/or obese with massive health problems, or someone who yo-yo diets because they have no idea of self-control or support.

FACT THREE: Obese children are at risk of severe health problems

This is a scary one. Especially when you look at the list of what health problems can develop *just from carrying too much weight*. These problems are not there for any other reason. The problems develop because the child is overweight. That's it. Stark fact. If you do not help your child to change their eating habits and become more active, then your child will be at risk of developing one or more of the health problems I will go into in the next chapter. And let's not beat about the bush. Some of these problems can be fatal. And if you think I'm trying to scare you, then good. I probably need to scare you. I'm not over-dramatising either. I just don't want Fact Four to happen.

FACT FOUR: Parents may soon start outliving their obese children

Just think about that for a moment. No one wants to outlive their children. Of course they don't. But if the problem of childhood obesity is not tackled, then this may very well happen. If you decide to ignore the 'puppy fat' and let your child grow up to become an obese adult, riddled with health problems and being at tremendous risk of heart failure, then you may very well end up burying your child.

FACT FIVE: Obese children are less active than the average pensioner

Can this be true? Yes, it can. Research by the BBC, revealed that the average child is less active in the average day, than an average pensioner. So let's think about that. We don't know exactly what the BBC classed as an average child, or an average day, or an average pensioner. But if you try to think about it, it's still pretty thought provoking. Imagine a Mr Smith, 70 years of age, touch of arthritis or angina. He gets up and ambles around his home getting ready to go out to collect his pension. He drives to the post office, perhaps, stands in line and talks to a few people. Then he goes shopping, pushing the trolley before going home to unpack. If the day is nice, he goes outside and does a spot of gardening, getting those weeds out of his rose bed or mowing the lawn. He might have a dog to walk or a game of bowls to go and play in the evening.

Not incredibly active, but active all the same. He's not

pounding away at the treadmill in the gym, but he is being active and that is something that the majority of overweight children are not. Okay, they may do P.E. at school, but do they put any effort into it? Do they try for about five minutes before they go all red in the face and huff and puff because they're out of breath? Do they run around and play at playtime?

Because Mr Smith doesn't get out of breath after five minutes, but an overweight child will. Because of the strain on the heart to pump so hard around a too-large body that is demanding oxygen rich blood. Think about that.

FACT SIX: The average teenager eats three pre-packaged/ready meals per week

This includes takeaways and fast food too. Why is this? Why would a family need to pay for three (or more) takeaways or fast food per week? That's expensive. It would be so much cheaper to make their own pizza with fresh, healthy ingredients at home.

So why?

It's because we live in an 'instant' culture. We expect, and demand, instant service. We have microwaves to cook food fast. We have drive thrus for those who can't be bothered to get out of their car and eat at a proper table. We have computers that instantly load games, when twenty years ago, you had to wait three or more minutes for your Spectrum to load up a tape cassette game. We have instant

popcorn, frozen 'ready' meals, and tremendous amounts of instant gratification in this 'instant' society.

There is no patience. Think of road-rage. Think of stress levels. People today want stuff, and they want it now! They don't want to wait. Especially children. They ask and they are given. And this occurs with food. They don't have to wait for the ice-cream man to come round each tea time, they can have a few tubs of it in the freezer and eat it at breakfast if they want to. They want some chips? They can microwave some in just a minute. They want a burger and fries? They can get one from the local take-away. In minutes, rather than wait for Mum or Dad to make some home made.

It's laziness. And impatience. But laziness is also a huge problem that contributes towards the even bigger problem of childhood obesity.

The other problem with take-out food and ready-prepared meals are the high levels of salt. Too much sodium is also bad for the system, but eating a diet rich in salt can actually *alter* the taste sensations in your mouth. A body can get used to it and when you try to eat a food without salt, it can taste bland or awful to you, so you ignore it and keep with your salty requirements. Therefore buying more and more take out. Therefore ignoring the healthy salt-less foods.

These are just a few facts about obesity, but very important ones. I'm sure there are others, but I won't bombard you with information that you already know. Because you *do*

know that your child being overweight or obese is unhealthy. You do know that if you don't do something about it they're unlikely to change. And you also know that they're probably going to have health problems because of it.

The first way to tackle a problem is to admit that there *is one*. And by picking up this book, then you've done that, otherwise you wouldn't be reading it.

So. There's a problem. You want to do something about it, but what? Perhaps you ought to know just exactly what you're up against?

What *might* happen if you fail to help your child?

Knowing the consequences of failure can be an incredibly motivating factor to actually succeed. So let's look at what problems can develop.