



Photo courtesy of Columbus Children's Hospital

Columbus Children's Dietician Lori Mooney shows 13-year-old Danny Gwartz how much sugar is found in common foods and beverages.

Smart snacking, additional activity combats summer weight gain

Who do you think is at fault for the roughly 17 percent of U.S. children who are obese and the even greater percentage who are overweight?

Schools have born much of the criticism as of late. Under fire for unhealthy lunches, vending machines and cuts in physical education, they've been blamed for neglecting students' health needs.

Did you know that nearly 40 percent of Ohio third graders were found to be overweight or at risk?

Actually, schools may do a better job than parents keeping children fit and trim. A new study of 5- and 6-year-olds indicates our nation's children gain up to three times more weight during summer break than during the school year, according to the April issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Although the study doesn't indicate what's behind the weight gain, experts at Columbus Children's Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition have a pretty good idea.

"Excessive snacking, poor food choices, too much television time and limited physical activity are likely to blame," said Lori Mooney, a registered dietician at Columbus Children's. "These factors contribute to childhood obesity year-round, but the problem is magnified during the summer when many kids are free to eat and lounge as they please."

At the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition, Mooney helps kids and teens of all ages such as 13-year-old Danny Gwartz, slim down and shape up. In four months, Danny has lost six pounds while still growing in height. One of the first things Danny learned was to limit soda and sugary drinks, which can pack on pounds. The average teen drinks 868 cans of soda a year, and one 12-ounce can contains 10 teaspoons of sugar, according to Mooney.

"That surprised me," Danny said. "It's hard to believe that a can that small has so much sugar."

Studies show that nearly one-third of calories consumed by children and teens come from sugary drinks and snack-type foods. In fact, a 2003 survey showed that

To avoid summer weight gain:

- Limit TV/computer/video game time to two hours per day. Children younger than 2 years shouldn't watch any TV.
- Encourage at least 60 minutes of daily outdoor play.
- Choose water or sugar-free, calorie-free beverages.
- Offer sensible snack options such as granola bars, 100-calorie snack packs, dried fruit, almonds, whole-grain breads and cereals, low-fat or skim milk, low-fat cheese and yogurt, and fruits and veggies.
- Pay attention to portion sizes: Sports drinks are often two or more servings per bottle and contain plenty of sugar. A 3-ounce serving of meat is about the size of a deck of cards. Limit pasta, potatoes and other sides to the size of your fist.
- Eat breakfast, and don't skip meals.
- Limit fast food.

only 30 percent of Ohio teens reported eating fruits at least once per day in the week before the study.

Snacking often occurs in front of the computer or television screen. Thirty-two percent of Ohio teens report that they watch three or more hours of TV during the average school day. That number can be much higher during the summer months as children choose video and computer games over outdoor play. They're snacking more and exercising less.

This summer, Danny is planning to reverse the trend thanks to the advice he's receiving at Children's. He's limiting portion size, cutting calories and exercising more frequently; the most he'll gain this summer is a little R&R.

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Columbus Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.