

## Seminole Woman Establishing Lifelong Healthy Habits in Girls

The advent of a new year traditionally signals a time to take stock of our lives and resolve to make improvements. One of the more popular New Year's resolutions, and one many of us have repeatedly made, is to get fit and lose weight – not an easy task.

Alarmed at the increasing levels of childhood obesity, we may be tempted to urge our daughters to make their own New Year's resolution to lose weight. In doing so, they may be establishing a lifetime of eating disorders and related health issues. There are better ways to encourage our daughters to live well and develop healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

At home and when eating out, we can model healthy eating habits and help all our children to be more aware of what they are eating. We can also find creative ways to make favorite dishes healthier and include our daughters in meal planning and preparation.

When we engage in any physical activity as a family – whether it is cycling, 5k walk-runs or playing flag football – there is a great opportunity to model and influence healthy behaviors. A side benefit of physical activity is an increase in self-esteem and a reduction in stress – benefits that we can all enjoy.

Help your daughter find activities that are fun and she'll be more likely to stick to them. There are several community resources available that encourage healthy nutrition and regular physical activity. The key to choosing the right program is finding a place where your daughter can develop to her full potential, have fun and make meaningful friendships in an all girl environment. This is especially important as research has shown that physical activity programs should be designed specifically for girls.

At Girl Scouts of Citrus Council, we regularly partner with other organizations to offer programs that focus on good nutrition, physical activity, healthy body image and healthy relationships. Together with Florida Hospital, we recently created the "Healthy 100 Kids" badge, an initiative designed to help girls stay active while providing parents with resources to help their child live a longer, healthier and happier life. As a coalition member of the National Girls and Women in Sports Day (NGWSD), Girl Scouts will celebrate the theme of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of NGWSD on February 2, "Play, Believe Achieve."

Healthy living is a lifestyle, one we and our daughters will celebrate for life.

Consider:

- Among preschool children aged 2–5, obesity increased from 5.0% to 10.4% between 1976–1980 and 2007–2008 and from 6.5% to 19.6% among those aged 6–11. Among adolescents aged 12–19, obesity increased from 5.0% to 18.1%

during the same period. (2007-2008 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey)

- Obese children and adolescents are at risk for health problems during their youth and as adults. For example, during their youth, obese children and adolescents are more likely to have risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes) than are other children and adolescents. (Center for Disease Control [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
- Some consequences of childhood and adolescent overweight are psychosocial. Obese children and adolescents are targets of early and systematic social discrimination. The psychological stress of social stigmatization can cause low self-esteem which, in turn, can hinder academic and social functioning, and persist into adulthood. (Center for Disease Control [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
- In 2005, more high school females (72.2%) than their male counterparts (56.2%) did **not** meet currently recommended levels of physical activity—doing any kind of physical that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard for a total of at least 60 minutes per day. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 2005*)
- For girls ages 11-17 it is the *perception* of being overweight, not just weight alone, that inhibits participation in sports and physical activities. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living (2006)*)
- Adolescent girls who are overweight have reported experiences with stigmatization such as direct and intentional weight-related teasing, jokes and derogatory name calling, as well as less intentional, potentially hurtful comments by peers, family members, employers and strangers. (American Obesity Association, *Obesity in Youth, AOA Fact Sheets, 2002*)
- The more physically active girls are, the greater their self-esteem and the more satisfied they are with their weight, regardless of how much they weigh. Eighty-three percent of very active girls say that physical activity makes them feel good about themselves. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living (2006)*)
- Adolescent girls prefer different activities, tend to participate in physical activity for dissimilar reasons than boys, and may face various barriers, indicating that targeted interventions should be designed specifically for girls. (*Listening to Girls and Boys Talk About Girls' Physical Activity Behaviors, February 2006*)

*Dr. Pam Lennox, EdD is the CEO of Girl Scouts of Citrus Council. Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. Girl Scouts of Citrus Council serves more than 18,000 girls and 7,000 volunteers in Brevard, Lake, Seminole, Orange, Osceola and Volusia counties.*