TODAY'S YOUTH NEED HEALTHY NUTRITIONAL CHOICES

By James Johnson, RCN, CSN, CMA

Today's youth need healthy nutritional choices for healthy living. Healthy eating habits begin with parents choosing quality foods, because parents set the example for their children to follow and give them what's needed for a sound diet. In my work, however, I see youth nutrition habits geared towards sweets and junk food snacks. Children get hardly any vegetables—the important food group that probably offers the greatest nutritional benefits.

Our youth are indeed coming to adulthood in a time of high nutritional risk. During the phase of their greatest growth when their need for nutrients rises steeply, they typically meet those demands with inadequate food choices, unhealthy eating habits, and insufficient intakes of calories and protein, vitamins and minerals. Parents, teachers and coaches are the key: only they can instill healthy eating habits and help kids avoid the refined sugars, flours, and high-fatty fast foods that now dominate children's diets at exactly that growth phase when they need the nourishing foods essential to proper mental and physical development. Also, childhood and adolescence are when all people build the healthy nutritional habits required to combat obesity, which is presently taking a heavy toll on youth in today's society. Youthful obesity usually results from bad nutritional choices and a lack of exercise and/or participation in sports.

A good diet and exercise regime is a great combination for optimal health and for lasting weight reduction. A regular, sustained exercise program boosts metabolism, burning the calories/nutrients we take in, thereby preventing obesity and the unhealthy risks associated with it. Exercise can also boost children's attitudes and their mental performance. Parents, teachers and coaches need to support these efforts and help youth understand the benefits of healthy living. We do this by being role models: by exercising and eating well ourselves, and by making available to children at home, at school, and at the gym simple, nourishing foods such as nuts, fresh fruits, and vegetables. These make easy, nourishing anytime snacks.

Parents should also be sure to provide optimal nutrition supplements to meet a child's basic dietary needs and to prevent nutrient deficiencies. All parents know how difficult it is to feed children the required amount of fruits and vegetables that is so important to their growing bodies when they would rather reach for the sweet or fatty snack.

As a Clinical and Sports Nutritionist, and former 3X USA National Wrestling Champion, I am aware of the many nutritional issues confronting youth in our society today. If you are seeking the best way to utilize fitness, nutrition and sports for your lifestyle, visit our website at www.jjchamp3x.com or contact us at 1-888-877-2322 (toll free) or email info@jjchamp3x.com.