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Physical activities for overweight and obese children – an inclusive approach

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Abstract

This paper is tackling the inclusion of the overweight and obese children in the physical education classes. The physical problem is just the pick of the iceberg, because the psychological reverberations are deeper, causing low self esteem and a lack of self confidence. Being obese for a child is a handicap perceived worst than living without a leg. Facing such a perspective and being aware about the significance of physical activity in reducing the weight and in promoting a healthy life style, we must considerate some inclusion measures for overweight and obese children in regular physical education classes. Communication and motivation are the instruments that a teacher can use in operating changes in the student personality. These changes can have different intensities and could be cognitive, affective or behavioral.

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1. Introduction

This paper is tackling the inclusion of the overweight and obese children in the physical education classes in schools and also in independent physical activities. Until now being an overweight or obese child was not considered as being a person with special needs or a child that requires a special inclusion attention. In physical activities some of these children are facing difficulties in achieving some tasks or maintaining the pace with their colleagues. The physical problem is just the pick of the iceberg, because the psychological reverberation are more deep causing low self esteem and a lack of self confidence. Being obese for a child is a handicap perceived worst than living without a leg.

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An adult overweight person is anyone who has a Body Mass Index (BMI) over 25. For children over the age of two are used BMI centile charts, which differs by age and gender. BMI above the 85th centile and below the 95th centile indicates a child is overweight. The 95th centile and above indicates obesity. Even obesity is very similar to be overweight; the difference consists in the amount of fat stored in the body.

The weight problems of children and young people are associated with depression, asthma, being bullied, learning difficulties and type 2 diabetes. The greater the BMI, the greater the risk to health.

According to a Romanian Public Health Institute report published in 2008, in 8 years the number of obese children starting primary school has doubled (from 1,8% to 3,6%). The overweight children have minimum odds for a future normal BMI, 80% of them become overweight and obese teenagers and adults. Romania seems to catch up with European countries in terms of overweight and obesity. The explanation consists in the balance between sedentary behavior and physical activity and the changes in people's nurturing habits after the half of the XX-Th century. Technology development replaced the human work force with machines reducing gradually the people's physical effort. Food habits and customs do change, and they are influenced in many different ways. Urbanization, modernization and globalization have often led to diets in which a greater percentage of energy intake comes from sugar and fats, and the consumption of salt is considerably increased.

Facing such a perspective and being aware about the significance of physical activity in reducing the weight and in promoting a healthy life style, we must considerate some inclusion measures for overweight and obese children in regular physical education classes.

2. Educational and cultural aspects of overweight

In high income countries overweight and obesity are specific to the low level of education and income people. In the developing countries this health related factors are more frequent at people with higher economic status.

Besides the financial means, understanding the benefits of healthy nurturing and making the correct choices is a cultural issue.

There are cultural differences between world regions regarding the nutrition with important effects on longevity, active life and health's population there. There is also an eating culture different from region to region and from one community to another, depending on food resources. The environment is an important factor in what, how and in which amount a population eat. Natural condition influence the variety of fauna and vegetable species and as a consequence the food quality and diversity.

Often youth and children are the targets of advertising for high-calorie, high-fat snacks and sugary drinks. The goal of these ads is to sway people to buy these high-calorie foods, and often they do. Children are easily tempted by instantaneous pleasures, e.g. sweets, candies or chocolate bars, and they are not necessarily in a position to balance their short-term satisfaction versus their long-term consequences. Companies are exploiting this lack of self control and discernment by the way they provide information to consumers and for children is not easy to understand the permeable boundaries between education, advertising and entertainment.

Research shows that exposure to food advertisements produces significant increases in calorie intake in all children and the increase is largest in obese children (Halford, 2007). The role of parents is to watch and balance the children's diet and there for their personal example is decisive.

On the other hand slimness is seen as the desirable standard and as the beauty pattern especially for young women. Landmarks that society promotes are very severe for most girls and put them in a position of inferiority, repercussions on self esteem and confidence. Self-esteem is a psychological component of self-image and there is a strong, positive correlation between them (Abell & Richards, 1996, Oktan & Şahin, 2010, Pop & Ciomag, 2013). Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, and our behaviour clearly reflects those feelings.

As they grow up children are building a picture or image of themselves. This image develops through the things that they can or cannot do and by hoe other people see them. Poor opinion of our body can cause low self esteem and self confidence. Constantly watching 'perfect' bodies can feed teenage insecurities over attractiveness and weight. Studies show that idealized body image contributes to eating disorders, steroid use, and plastic surgery (www.screensmart.ca/screens_health).

In a study I made about students' needs and expectations relating to physical activity I interviewed 120 young female mostly between 19 and 20 years old. 63% of the girls say they are not satisfied with their appearance; the

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