



Why Does the U.S. First Lady Care About Childhood Obesity?

By Jocelyn Frye



First lady Michelle Obama and local children attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the most people doing jumping jacks in 24 hours at the White House on October 11, 2011. ©AP Images

“... one-third of U.S. children born since 2000 could get diabetes.”

Many U.S. families live very busy lives, making it easy to fall into a pattern of dropping by fast food restaurants too often and exercising less than we should. First lady Michelle Obama, who not long ago lived the normal life of a busy working mother, once found her own family falling into these habits.

After a conversation with the family pediatrician, Mrs. Obama realized that her family could benefit from a bigger emphasis on healthy living. After making a

few simple changes, such as adding more fruits and vegetables to meals, she could see a positive difference in the well-being of her family. Mrs. Obama’s personal experience inspired her to start the national “Let’s Move!” campaign in February 2010.

“Let’s Move!” encourages American families and communities to lead healthier, more active lives — and to set patterns of healthy living for future generations. It promotes making small changes that add up to big differences for health — changes like walking to

school or work, drinking fewer sugary drinks, eating fewer desserts, and eating more fruits and vegetables.

Through “Let’s Move!” Mrs. Obama is reminding Americans not to forget about their health and well-being in the midst of busy lifestyles. In addition to spreading information to parents and caregivers, the campaign brings attention to supplying healthier food in schools and improving access to affordable healthy food.

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An Important Goal

“Let’s Move!” has the ambitious goal of ending childhood obesity within a generation. This goal is important in the United States because the number of overweight children in the country has tripled during the past 30 years, and nearly one-third of U.S. children are overweight or obese.

If these trends continue, one-third of U.S. children born since 2000 could get diabetes later in their lives and many others could have other serious weight-related problems, like asthma, heart disease, high blood pressure and cancer. An increase in these diseases would raise the cost of health care for everyone in the United States.

For help spreading the word, Mrs. Obama has reached out to governments, community organizations and private companies. She has built relationships with companies that make snack foods, visited schools, spoken to grocery retailers, met with restaurant associations and appeared at events to highlight the need for exercise and healthy eating.



As part of a “Let’s Move!” clinic, Mrs. Obama plays soccer on the South Lawn of the White House on October 6, 2011. ©AP Images

Since the “Let’s Move!” campaign started, many companies have agreed to change some of their marketing and labeling practices, and community groups have started local programs to encourage exercise and better nutrition.

President Obama has established the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, and it has developed an action plan to reduce the childhood obesity rate to 5 percent — where it was before starting to rise in the late 1970s — by 2030. The report makes 70 recommendations for ways to reduce the rate.

Jocelyn Frye is the policy director in the office of first lady Michelle Obama. *Courtesy White House*



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