

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

What can we do for Childhood Obesity? Let's go Dancing!

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In the last years, children living in developed countries became more and more severely obese, at a younger age.

Unfortunately, today's children are usually taken in a stroller, dressed, washed, taken to the school by car and, at times, also fed by parents up to adolescence. Very often they are committed to television viewing, an always available, inexpensive babysitter, but with some unknown long-term adverse effects on health (Viner & Cole, 2005). Finally, many children are not sufficiently listened to; as a consequence, their negative emotions go unrecognized (alexithymia) or denied and a "sweet snack" solves their problem (Baldaro *et al.*, 2003). How can we then be surprised if one child in three is overweight or obese?

Only a focus on increasing enjoyable physical activity, while decreasing sedentary behaviour, has proved effective in managing weight, without negative psychological consequences (Field *et al.*, 2003). Substantial gains could be made by investing in the promotion of health and fitness throughout life. Enjoyable experiences, such as singing, dancing and playing music, positively affect people, changing their attitude and perception for life.

There are many physical activities that children can learn at school, but only few, such as walking and dancing, are likely to help them to keep an active attitude until old age. Folk dancing is an agreeable and inexpensive activity, practicable at every age, season and time, especially with friends in free time, with a benefit in the treatment of obesity (Robinson *et al.*, 2003).

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Short daily lessons with skilled trainers, beyond realizing a prevention of all weight-related diseases, could also help children to develop socialization skills, increasing their self-confidence and reducing television viewing and body-image dissatisfaction (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).

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