

Putting a Stop to Childhood Obesity

By Tony Sparber

What's the top health concern among parents for American kids in 2009? Child abuse? Drug abuse? Internet safety? Smoking? These concerns certainly have merit, but according to a National Poll on Children's Health conducted by the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, parents said childhood obesity tops the list.

The Centers for Disease Control has found that the obesity rate among children ages 6-11 has more than doubled in the past 25 years, rising from 6.5 percent in 1980 to 17 percent in 2006. Among adolescents ages 12-19, the rate has more than tripled, from 5 percent to 17.6 percent. And these numbers say nothing about those children who are not yet obese, but are clearly overweight.

And while no other health concern is exploding at such mind-numbing rates, the health risks associated with obesity are even scarier. The *Journal of Pediatrics* recently found that an estimated 61 percent of obese young people have at least one additional risk factor for heart disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. The U.S. Surgeon General adds that children who are obese are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems, such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem. These children are more likely than children of normal weight to become overweight or obese adults, and are therefore more at risk for associated adult health problems, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer and osteoarthritis.

How Did They Get So Fat?

There's no doubt that diets loaded with non-nutritious, high-calorie foods are at the root of kids' weight problems.

Yet the amount of daily calories consumed by our children has not increased so dramatically over the last 20 years to cause these double and triple rates. What has changed, however, is that the amount of daily activity has dropped significantly over the last 20 years.

The National Institutes of Health recently released the results of a long-term study of more than 800 children. At age 9, the researchers tracked the participants' daily activity levels with an accelerometer (a device that records movement, which the children wore on a belt). They evaluated their movements to see if the children achieved the minimum 60

There's plenty of time to enjoy summer even though the start of school is n



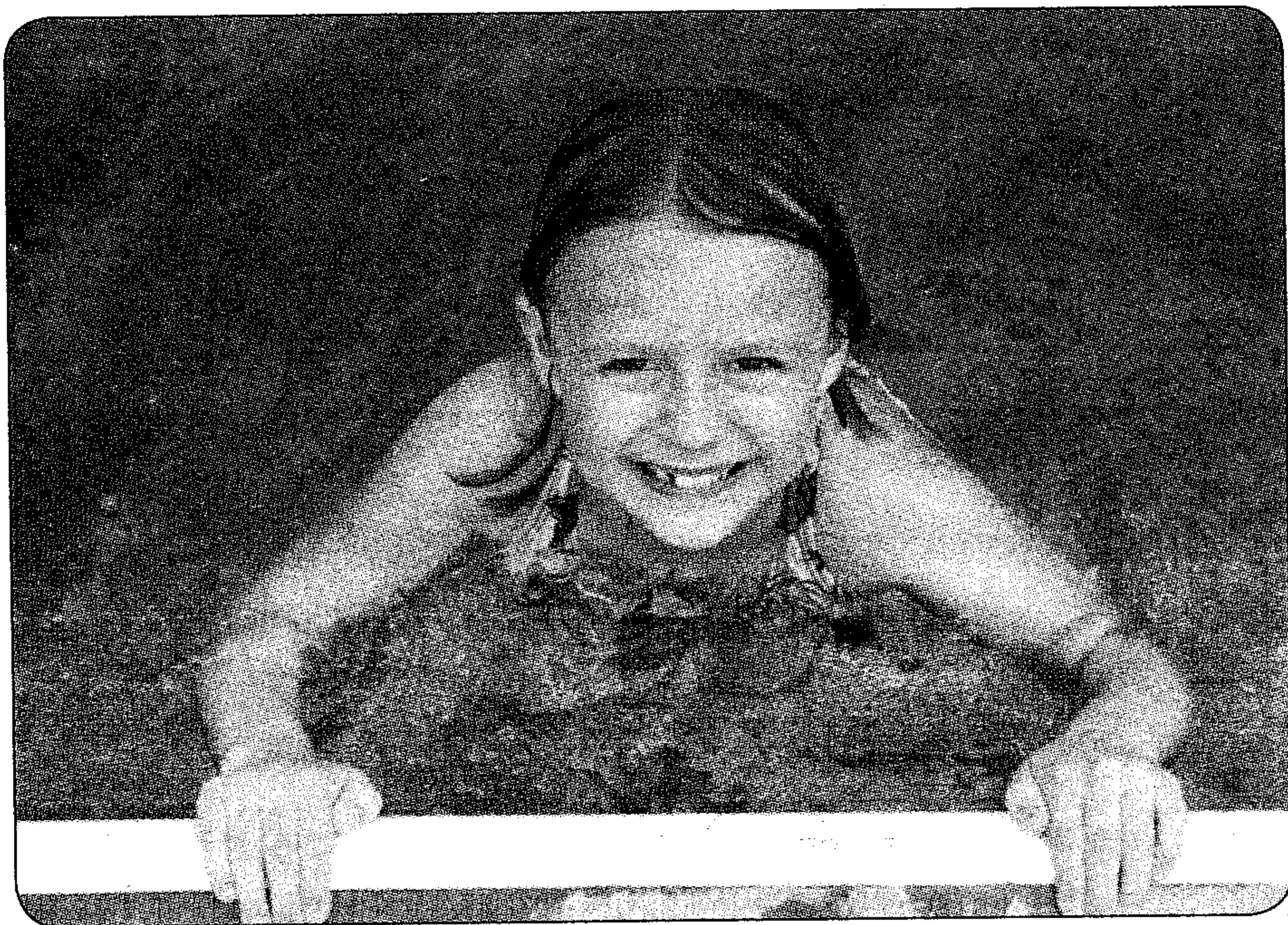
New IMAX Theater and LE Store at Concord Mills

Check out the new IMAX at AMC Concord Mills 24, featuring IMAX's digital projection system and showing Hollywood's biggest movies that have been digitally re-mastered into IMAX's format. "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" is now showing. Upcoming movies include "Disney's A Christmas Carol" (Nov. 6) and "Avatar" (Dec. 18). Add \$4 to any regular AMC ticket price for the IMAX movie.

Before or after the movie, be sure to stop in at the new LEGO store — 4,520 square feet of colorful design fun! It's in Neighborhood 2, across from the Nike Factory Store, and features a Master Builder Bar, where kids can build physically, as well as virtually.



begins about 8:30 p.m. and
Refreshments available for
• Take a seat at the
East Blvd., on Aug. 14 and
enjoy "August Rush." Tickets
provided, and there are also
gifts cards, DVD players



- **Community service** — Many parents have found that being involved in service activities is the perfect way to keep the family together and active while working toward a common goal. Look for opportunities where you might plant flowers and shrubs around public buildings or parks, do litter patrol on a nearby road or in local streams, help elderly neighbors mow or rake their yards, or clean up a town park. The possibilities for service to others are endless.

- **Plug in** — In the “if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em” category, there are ways to use electronic recreation to help kids stay active. Give your kids a video camera and encourage them to make their own music videos, their own reality show, their own “dancing with my friends” TV special, or their own nature trail travelogue — anything that gets them up and moving! Nintendo’s Wii Sports lets kids “play” tennis, baseball, golf, bowling and boxing while mimicking the physical actions of swinging a racket, bat or club; rolling a ball down an alley; or pulling up the left jab.

Taking It to the Next Step

These activities can keep a child active and fit, but if your child already is struggling with weight gain, it may be time for more proactive measures. Many children need peer support, structured programs and professional guidance to change the habits that sabotage weight-loss efforts. Consider looking into a weight-loss camp for next summer, where kids engage in a multitude of fun activities, meet new friends and gain renewed self-esteem. When kids get away from the comforts of home and learn about nutrition, exercise and behavioral habits, and they combine that knowledge with a mandatory healthy diet and active lifestyle, they succeed.

Tony Sparber is the founder/owner of two New Image Camps that provide summer weight-loss program for preteens and teens: Camp Pocono Trails in Pennsylvania and Camp Vanguard in Florida. Call 800-365-0556 or visit www.newimagecamp.com.