



# The **FAT** Combatant

JYL STEINBACK IS FIGHTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY.

By Kevin Whipps | Photography by Carl Schultz

America is fat. Go ahead and take a quick look at yourself in the mirror, we'll wait. Probably got an extra pound or two that you'd like to remove, right? Maybe those extra latkes during Hanukkah added a bit more to your spare tire than you'd like to admit, or you indulged too much at your office "holiday" party. Either way, we can all admit to hitting the drive-thru more than we should, and as a result, we're fat.

Now being an adult and overweight is one thing, but being a kid is a whole other ball game. Overweight children are picked on more than their peers, and often have social and emotional issues to deal with as a result. They don't get enough exercise and some learn to eat their way out of depression. Thirty years ago, overweight preteens were in the minority. Today, it's an epidemic. Surely someone is trying to do something about this, right? Somebody? Anybody? Bueller?

Have you met Jyl Steinback yet? Chances are you haven't, but maybe you went to a ShapeUp US event held in the Valley recently, or you have a kid in school and he or she met her. Steinback is working hard to make sure your kids don't end up the pudgy dough balls they could easily become, and she's combating childhood obesity the only way she knows how. She kicks its butt.

## YOU'RE THE PROBLEM

To really understand the cause of childhood obesity, you have to understand how it came to be. For example, as a child, I grew up watching my father eat hamburgers from fast food restaurants just one way: ketchup only. No mustard, no lettuce, just ketchup, a burger, bun and maybe cheese. That's it. As a result, that's how I eat my burgers today — I can't even look at mustard as an option, it seems foreign to me. Point is, kids learn from their parents, so whatever we put into our mouths is what they're going to put into theirs. To keep childhood obesity at bay, we have to start at the beginning.

Steinback has always been into health and wellness, even back in her younger days. When she went pro, she started as a personal trainer in Beverly Hills, beginning the first Elizabeth Arden exercise program in the process. When she started having children, childhood obesity wasn't the major problem it is today, but she still wanted her kids to enjoy an active and healthy lifestyle. "I watch [the progress] with my own children, that they started this [healthy lifestyle] when they were born and they never think any differently," Steinback says.

This pattern kept on going throughout her kids' lives, even as they became responsible for their own food. "Even when my daughter would have slumber parties, instead of me doing the grocery shopping, I would take them [to the store] the night of the slumber party [and] I would give them what we called the Fat Wheel," she says. This "Fat Wheel" would show the kids exactly what they were putting into their bodies, so they could educate themselves. Eventually it meant they didn't run to the store and buy everything they needed to make s'mores; instead they bought healthier alternatives with a few vices thrown in.

Physical activity was another thing Steinback focused on with her own family, even when they were too little to walk. "I like to climb mountains outdoors," she says. "They'd be in the frontpack when they were young, [then] in the backpack, and then finally, [they would] use their own little legs and we'd go up and have fun." It gave her kids a solid love for fitness from a very young age, so much so that it just became a regular way of life for them — most of the time. "Now, they didn't always like it, so we would do something else [sometimes], but they would — at least when they were small enough that they didn't have a choice — they would do what I wanted in the frontpack or backpack."

Again, this all comes down to what Steinback did herself first, then showed her children as a result. When kids are little, they want nothing more than to make their parents happy. If

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they learned that fitness was one of those things, and wanted to emulate their parents as a result, well that's a good thing. Being a good example yourself is one way to stop childhood obesity.

**A LACK OF MOTIVATION**

These things all sound good, but what if you're a parent who already has an overweight child? How do you stop the cycle?

The fix is to start a new routine that involves exercise. Again, lead by example, and make sure you stick with it. "I tell people it takes 21 days to make a habit, and it takes 30 days to make a lifestyle change, so those 30 days are tough — you really fight it to the core," Steinback says.

It's true. Changing your life to become more physically fit is a challenge most people just don't want to take on. And if you've spent most of your life forming the perfect buttprint in your sofa, chances are pretty good you're resistant to change. But there are other options.

"The other thing I tell people is, go get a puppy," says Steinback, a dog lover herself. "Even if you're not exercising for yourself, you have to exercise the puppy or the dog or whoever you have." This tricks your brain into thinking you're not exercising yourself — it's for the puppy. And who doesn't want to make a puppy happy? "I tell people, it doesn't have to be 45 minutes, it can be 10 minutes two times a day — that's more than you did yesterday."

It's about progress, no matter how small.

Each one of these steps is important to the overall picture, particularly with your children. If they seem content to sit in front of the television all day while eating Oreos, then limit the family's TV time and go

outside to do something together. Toss the ball around the yard, go for a bike ride or just take a walk. Any amount of exercise above and beyond what you already do will be progress, and from there you just have to keep pushing forward.

**ENTER THE PROGRAM**

But no matter what you do to try to make yourself happy, your child might be too set in his or her own ways. That's why Shape Up US exists, and they have tools to help your kids exercise.

One such tool is the Hip Hop Healthy Heart Program for Children. It's a comprehensive K-6 wellness program that



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focuses on cardiovascular disease and obesity prevention. But this program isn't just about overall health, it's also about managing stress, including financial stress.

Some parents don't teach their children much about finances, such as how to save money and how to spend it wisely. As a result, many kids enter college with the burden of student loans over their heads. Then they sign up for three credit cards because they get a free T-shirt with each one, and hey, what college kid doesn't need a free T-shirt?

Financial stress can indirectly impact other areas of our lives, including what we consume. Have you ever been stressed out and knocked down a quart of Ben & Jerry's? Learning how to manage stress in all its forms, including "stress-eating," is a part of the program too. "Financial fitness is huge, as you know, on the health rating of what I'm going to eat, and stress foods, and everything else because of today's world," Steinback says. "So we teach kids how to handle their finances."

Think, too, about the psychology of eating and your finances. McDonald's has a 99-cent value menu for a reason: people want food, and they don't want to pay a lot for it. So, 99 cents for a cheeseburger? I'll take two — and the 24 grams of fat that come along for the ride. But we're not thinking of anything but the price at the time, so we consume that cheeseburger (ketchup only, of course) and go on about our day.

It seems like a minor part of the plan, and it doesn't seem to directly correlate to the problem of childhood obesity. But upon further examination, it's quite important for kids to know



■ [From Left]: Scott Steinback, Adam Columbo, Jamie Columbo and Jyl Steinback

anyway, and it will help them lose weight, or maintain a healthy one, in the long term.

There's another thing that Shape Up US does, and that's teach about sustainability. Or in other words, how to give back to the Earth and make the Earth healthy. Again, it's thinking outside the box like this that can help our kids dramatically later in life.

#### ACT NATIONAL

The problems of childhood obesity are certainly not just local issues, they're national. Steinback and Shape Up US know that, so they periodically hit the road to host their Health and Wellness Expo. "We just did one in October where we had about 10,000 people and 160 businesses come together in the community to help with this problem."

To help these expos succeed, Shape Up US partners with the city where the expo is located, as well as the local school districts. "So, for example, in Arizona we partnered with the City of Chandler and Chandler Unified School District," she explains. By getting the city and schools involved, it brings the community together to all get behind this admirable program.

Aside from Shape Up US, Steinback herself has made quite a splash on the national scene, broadcasting her healthy message on television, as well as at the many events she's spoken at across the country. She was even named "America's Healthiest Mom."

Think that's enough for one person to juggle? Steinback doesn't, and she's busy with writing as well. She's published several cookbooks, all focused on healthy foods that a busy mother can make. Titles include "The Busy Mom's Slow Cooker Cookbook," "Supermarket Gourmet" and "Fill Up to Slim Down." She's even got a few more in the works. "I'm looking to come out with a new cookbook called "Thinking Outside the Lunchbox."

#### MORE THAN A NAME

Working out regularly is a challenge for anyone, and it truly takes a commitment of time, energy and soul to turn around your life and become healthy. Steinback knows that, which is why she strives to be an example to her kids and the country of how you can be in shape and still have fun. And if you don't make the time to do it, you're never going to execute. "I also tell people, 'Put yourself on your phone, put yourself in your calendar. You are that important,'" Steinback says.

Shape Up US is Steinback's big push to continue her life's mission, and she's already made quite a mark. In 2013 she plans to hold her Health and Wellness Expo in four cities, plus keep expanding. On a personal note, Steinback is a student at the American Medical College of Homeopathy and will continue her studies. She feels strongly it's the future of medicine, based on techniques of the past. "It's 100 years old, but people don't realize that probably our whole world is going to go to homeopathy because we're not going to be able to afford the medical care or it's not going to be the medical attention that we want," she says. "And so this is a phenomenal alternative. That is the spirit part of Shape Up, on the inside out." ■

Steinback wants to help everyone she can. Should you want help with your own fitness issues, you can email her at [jyl@shapeupus.org](mailto:jyl@shapeupus.org), or call her at 602-996-6300.

