

DON'T LET YOUR KID STUFF HIMSELF

Your child may eat heartily, but that doesn't mean he is healthy. An outwardly obese child can be malnourished and suffer many health risks, finds *BT*

There's a new face of malnutrition threatening global health and even India is falling victim to it. Like their American counterparts, Indian children too are eating a lot, becoming increasingly overweight and obese, but still not accruing the benefits of a nutrient-rich diet. This is primarily due to a high consumption of food that is energy dense but nutritionally poor.

Are you GI savvy?

■ According to Purva Duggal, chief dietician at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital, it's important to pay close attention to the Glycaemic Index (GI), as a high GI has been scientifically proved to contribute significantly to the obesity syndrome. Foods containing carbohydrates are of two types. Foods like grapefruit, skimmed milk, apples, pears, red lentils, roasted peanuts and whole-wheat pasta fall in the low-GI category. They release energy in a regulated amount over a longer time span, keeping the appetite satiated for a longer period. Those that fall in the high-GI group (these include white rice or bread, cornflakes, french fries, watermelon and mashed potato), release energy very quickly. This results in hunger resurging much faster. Consequently, the child eats more.

According to Duggal, as Indian children are more prone to eating high-GI food, the trick is to make them eat more low-GI food in smaller portions, thus cutting risk of obesity.

Why is your child especially at risk?

■ Genetic factors: Indian parents should be all the more careful about their children's obese disposition, because as Duggal says, "Genetically speaking, we are pre-disposed to insulin resistance which is now taken as a major cause behind diabetes (type 2) and obesity." Studies have also shown that low birth-weight babies have

insulin resistance and are therefore pre-disposed to obesity, adds Dr Archana Juneja, consultant endocrinologist at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital.

■ Food habits: "If that is not enough, the reliance on junk food, thanks to increasing disposable income of the parents, compounds the problem," says Duggal. Ready-to-eat food should be curbed as it is rich in sodium and con-

play area, prompt kids to get hooked on to indoor activities like watching television or playing computer games. Even otherwise, they hardly walk or run, notes paediatrician Dr Surekha Dhurandhar.

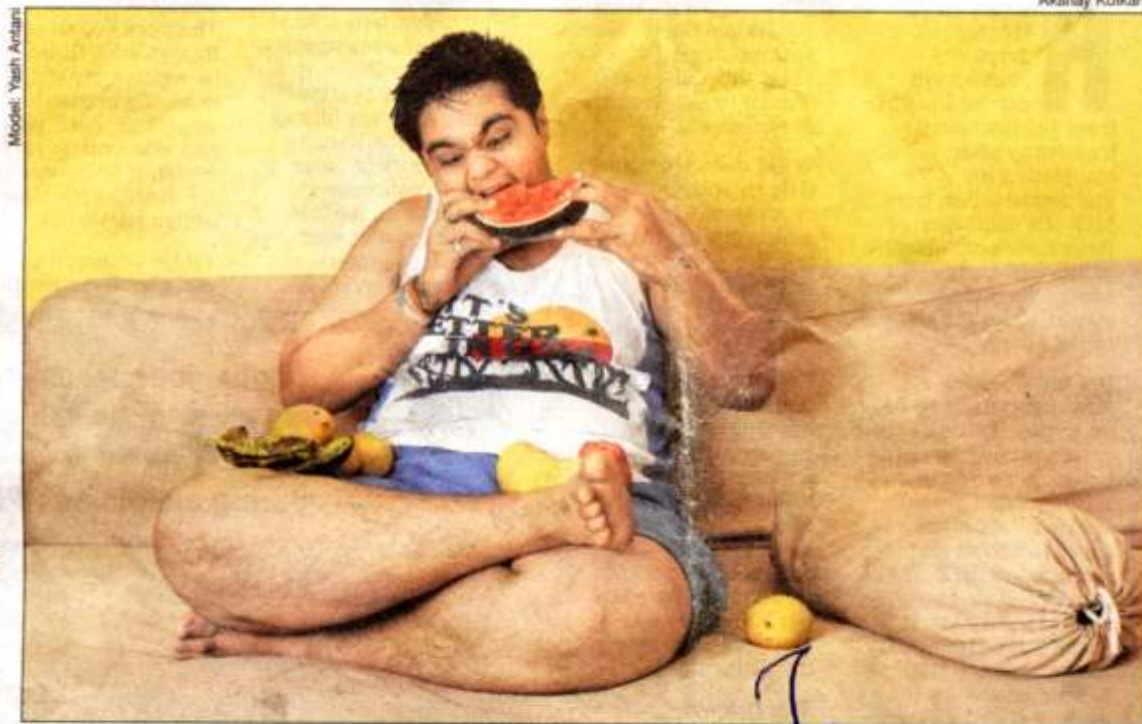
■ Strict parenting raises risk of child obesity: Latest studies reveal that children of authoritarian parents run five times the risk of becoming fat than

children of permissive parents. "There is a strong tendency towards obesity surfacing by the age of 10," says Dr K R Barik, paediatric (obesity) surgeon at Bombay Hospital.

How does obesity affect you?

■ Being obese or overweight child at high risk for early onset of serious chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and osteoarthritis. They often fall short of life expectancy. They suffer from respiratory diseases, sleep apnoea, bone and joint diseases, flat feet (where tendons are not developed properly). They find difficulty forming any physical activity, including walking, leading to physical problems, a strain to their well-being, often low self-esteem, concentration, irritability and an inferiority complex. "The first time you come to see me if your child refuses to take any suitable steps taken to tackle the obesity, they can suffer serious cases of complications," observes I

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contains added preservatives.

■ Fat = Healthy Mindset: Another common problem in India is how most parents equate a fat child with a healthy child. Yes, some amount of fat is necessary, but one must be realistic and the child should be encouraged to eat in smaller portions.

■ Lack of activity: Along with unhealthy food habits, today's children are hardly into physical activities. When they are not studying, they are attending tuition classes. Shrinking free time, increasingly nuclear families where children are pampered by working parents, or housing colonies with no

other children. That's because such a child may not be listening to his/her body as all decisions are taken by the parent.

Is your child obese?

■ Obesity is measured on the basis of the body mass index (BMI), height, weight, age and sex of the child in accordance to a standard chart available with paediatricians. "There has been an approximate 10 per cent increase in the number of obese children in India in the last decade. Girls show early signs of obesity compared to boys (at age eight while the latter's ten-

get your child to pick up correct habits automatically. For instance, you refrain from drinking aerated water and binge eating, the child will follow suit without any tantrum.

■ Make conscious lifestyle changes. Alterations in diet and physical activity are recommended as the effective therapy for correcting a weight problem. For instance, when it comes to celebrating birthdays, instead of buying him chocolate, treat him to fruit yoghurt and take him out for a nature walk or to the