

THE SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL LONG-TERM WEIGHT CONTROL

A Guide for Parents



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Nutritional and Behavioral Information based on the work of Dr. Daniel Kirschenbaum

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If you're reading this book, perhaps you're concerned about the trend in childhood obesity and want to take steps to prevent this from happening to your children. Or maybe you, your child or another family member already struggles with overweight. No matter what the reason, you're to be congratulated on taking the first step toward a healthier lifestyle for you and your loved ones. Anyone can develop the necessary tools to set and accomplish goals for better health. And this book can help you to do so.

One word of caution: This is NOT a diet book. To be "on a diet" implies that there is an "off the diet"—a beginning and an end to lifestyle changes made in order to lose weight. The key to achieving a healthy weight is to make behavioral changes that will last a lifetime.

Scope of the Obesity Problem

Hardly a day goes by that we don't see a newspaper headline or television newscaster proclaiming yet another grim statistic related to the "obesity epidemic." And it is true that Americans are getting heavier at an alarming rate. As many as 65% of adults today are overweight; half of those are obese.

Our children are no different. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost 9 million children and adolescents in the United States ages 6 to 19 are overweight. In fact, nearly twice as many children ages 6-11 and three times as many ages 12-19 are overweight than thirty years ago. Minority children are disproportionately affected; Native American, African American and Hispanic children are more likely to be overweight.

What has happened in three decades to so drastically change the picture of obesity? Overweight is linked primarily to three factors: poor diet, lack of exercise, and genetic predisposition. But societal changes occurring after World War II have increasingly contributed to an environment that encourages overeating and under-exercising. In other words, if we lived in another time and place, we'd probably be thinner. Consider the following:

We are a mobile society. Americans have a love affair with the automobile. When cars became affordable for most families and gas a relatively cheap resource, many of us were able to move a distance away from work or school. Instead of walking to school, work, church, stores, and the library, we began to drive everywhere. We continue this habit today—sometimes even if our destination is just a few blocks away!

A further factor in our use of automobiles is the need to protect our children in an increasingly dangerous society. Fear of allowing our offspring to cross busy roads and anxiety about child predators convince us that it's safer to drive our children where they need to go.

We are a sedentary society. Televisions, computers, and video games have taken the place of many healthy outdoor activities. The average “screen time” for an American child today is 5.5 hours per day. Adults log in just as much if not more time. An increased amount of sedentary time partnered with an increased amount of calories will result in weight gain.

We have many more food choices today. How many times have you gone to the store and felt overwhelmed by the dazzling array of choices—in cereals and breads, soft drinks, boxed and frozen foods? There are so many options available today that it’s sometimes time consuming and difficult to make the healthiest choice.

We are busy. With more and more two-income families, few of us have time to prepare and sit down to regular meals made from scratch and from nutritious ingredients. We’ve become a “grab and go” society, often relying upon less nutritious and high-caloric density prepared convenience foods. And some families eat out at fast food restaurants featuring calorie-dense and high fat foods weekly, or even daily, on their way to school and work, activities and obligations.

We are subjected to frequent advertising and marketing. Restaurants and food producers compete fiercely for the American dollar. And we in turn want the most for our money. Thus, the birth of “super sizing.” As a result, many of us have simply forgotten what a normal serving size looks like: portion distortion.

Our children are not immune to advertising either. Advertisers target young children in an attempt to create lifelong brand loyalty. In fact, according to Mediascope, a national research and policy organization whose mission has included the encouragement of responsible advertising, the American food industry spends \$36 billion a year on advertising, much of it directed toward children. Yet 95% of the commercials viewed by our youth are for foods high in sugar and/or fat. Studies have shown that children who are exposed repeatedly to such advertising develop a preference for these high calorie and nutrient-poor foods.

Our schools lack sufficient money for programs. We’ve come to expect the best for our children’s education: team sports, music programs, school-sponsored extracurricular activities, the best equipment and resources. In an effort to finance these things, many schools have signed contracts with vending machine companies, making sugary drinks and high fat snack items accessible to our children on a daily basis.

Soda and Childhood Obesity

Soft drinks are the leading source of added sugar in the typical teen diet. In fact, the average teen is getting about 15-20 teaspoons of added sugar from soft drinks alone each day! While boys generally drink more soda than girls, females who drink soda are less likely to get the calcium they need in their diets because soda often replaces milk as a beverage of choice. This situation can lead to the development of osteoporosis later in life. Encourage your children to drink water or skim milk rather than soda. Fruit juices are no better than soda. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics is now recommending that parents refrain from serving fruit juices to children.

The Genetic Factor

How do genetics play a part in overweight? We know that children with one obese parent have a 40% chance of becoming obese; for those with two obese parents, this likelihood rises to about 80%. There is increasing scientific evidence that we inherit a certain body build, and to some degree, even a certain adult weight. Studies involving adopted children have shown that many of them achieve an adult weight of within 10 pounds of their same sex biological parent. This may be due to our bodies having a certain predetermined “set point,” or a natural weight the body tries to maintain once we’ve stopped growing—which is related to how fast our individual metabolism burns calories. In other words, according to Dr. Richard Keesey of the University of Wisconsin, “The body has an opinion on what it should weigh.”

Although researchers don’t know the exact mechanisms of human weight regulation, they do know that the body maintains its natural weight—within 5-10 pounds—provided that we eat according to hunger, stop when full, and exercise moderately. When people drastically reduce calories, the body tries to maintain its natural set-point range by slowing the metabolism. This is why so many persons who lose weight by dieting gain the pounds back once off the diet—and often even more. Those who repeatedly go on restrictive diets may eventually find that their body set-point weight becomes higher than it was before they began dieting!

There is evidence that people have differing levels of hunger, too, which may account for why some people struggle with overweight. Research has shown that there are a number of body mechanisms responsible for regulating the human appetite; in 1994, scientists isolated one such chemical called Leptin. Produced by fat cells, this substance increases in the body when the amount of stored fat increases, and acts as a signal to the brain to stop eating. But while most obese persons have sufficient levels of Leptin, there appears to be a genetic predisposition for a lack of sensitivity to this chemical. That is, there is a breakdown in the message to the brain that regulates appetite suppression in response to increased Leptin levels.

Does this mean that we can’t fight Mother Nature? While biology is the single most important factor in determining whether a person is likely to become overweight, **BIOLOGY IS NOT DESTINY**. You can overcome your biology – in the same way that athletes transform their bodies to do things their biologies may have initially resisted. Indeed, people who are genetically predisposed to be overweight may never be model-thin, but they can maintain a healthy weight through a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, they often have to work harder than others to do so.

How Obesity Affects Children's Health

The increased rate of obesity among children has resulted in a subsequent rise of chronic obesity-related conditions in this population. Some of the more common ones are:

Asthma- In a recent study reported in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, researchers found that as many as 28% of new asthma cases in girls and young women aged 9-26 years are due to overweight. The reason for this is unclear, but may be due in part to the female increase in body fat beginning at puberty. Boys also develop asthma, but there appears to be no correlation between asthma and obesity in boys.

Diabetes- Type 2 diabetes, known as “adult onset diabetes” in the past, has become increasingly common among overweight children and teens. While the majority of these children have genetic factors that predispose them to developing diabetes, obesity plays a part in how soon this will happen. It is well known by scientists that the presence of excess fatty tissue reduces the efficiency of insulin, needed by the body to convert glucose to energy. As a result, the pancreas works too hard to produce even more insulin—and may eventually wear out, causing diabetes.

Gallstones- Cholelithiasis, or the presence of stones in the gallbladder, is associated with obesity in adults. While not as common a condition in obese adolescents, as many as 50% of the cases of cholelithiasis in children may be associated with overweight.

Cardiovascular Disease- Poor eating habits and subsequent overweight in children lead to higher levels of blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels—and the development of atherosclerosis, the most common cause of heart disease and premature death in adulthood. Blood pressure also rises when you're overweight, putting additional strain on the heart.

Early Maturation- Obesity can cause early development of puberty in girls. This can increase the likelihood of menstrual irregularities, such as uterine fibroids, later in life. Early onset of puberty is also associated with an increase in fat distribution to the upper body, particularly the abdomen—known to be a higher cardiovascular risk factor.

Sleeping Problems- As many as 7 percent of obese children have sleep apnea, a sleep disturbance where there are intervals of cessation of breathing lasting 10 seconds or more. During these periods of time, oxygen levels in the blood fall, a condition that may become life threatening. At the very least, sleep apnea can cause restlessness at night and difficulties in being able to stay alert during the day. This can interfere with performance in school and at work.

Orthopedic Problems- A variety of problems affecting the bones, joints and muscles of the feet, legs and hips can occur with obesity.

Psychological Problems- Kids who are overweight or obese are teased about their size. They are often rejected by their peers. Because they are seldom able to move as fast as others, they participate less frequently in sports, isolating them further. One recent study performed by a doctor at the University of California at San Diego concluded that the quality of life reported by obese children is as bad as that experienced by children with cancer receiving chemotherapy!

Any way you look at it, being overweight leads to a variety of health problems that should not accompany the early years of life. Some researchers believe that if the current childhood obesity epidemic continues unchecked, life expectancy will be significantly reduced in the coming years.

When to Start a Healthy Eating Program

The ideal time to begin a healthy eating program for your child is during infancy, before there is a problem, because overcoming overweight is a significant challenge. If not addressed, it is very likely to follow the child into adulthood. Does this mean that every chubby child will become an obese adult? Not necessarily. Persistence of obesity into adulthood depends upon several factors. The age at which a child becomes overweight is one; after age three, the likelihood that he will become an overweight adult is higher. In fact, the more overweight the child is and the longer he maintains this excess weight, the more likely it is that he will carry this problem into adulthood. By adolescence, about 70% of those children who are obese will end up as obese adults.

Another factor that predicts future obesity is whether a child's parents are obese. The presence of even one obese parent increases the chance that a child will develop a persistent weight problem.

Breastfeeding a baby is the best way to prevent overweight in infancy. Breast milk has exactly the right amount of fat, calories and nutrients for proper growth. And a breastfed infant can more easily self regulate her food intake by eating when hungry and stopping when full, whereas parents have a tendency to feed a bottle fed infant less frequently, and to encourage her to finish the entire bottle during feeding. Thus a bottle-fed baby is less likely than a breastfed baby to learn healthy appetite control habits.

Some parents are in a hurry to introduce solid foods to their child. This is not necessary before 4-6 months of age. Studies have shown that infants younger than this are less

able to show signs of fullness, such as turning their heads away—which may result in unintentional overfeeding. The type of solid food introduced first may also affect future food preference. In the United States, we tend to introduce fruits into a baby’s diet first, reinforcing a preference for sweet tastes. If we were to give less sweet foods such as vegetables first, there may be a better chance of infants learning to like—and maybe even prefer—these tastes over sweeter foods.

Before Making Changes

If you suspect that your child is overweight, the first step is to determine what his optimal weight should be. Most physicians now agree that body mass index (BMI) is a good tool for checking the weight status of both adults and children. BMI correlates with the amount of body fat and is a measure of weight for height. While adults with the same BMI reading may differ in their amount of body fat (related to age and gender), it is still a reliable method of predicting disease risk. As the BMI increases above 25, so does the risk for obesity-related diseases. BMI categories for adults are:

BMI	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5-24.9	Normal
25.0-29.9	Overweight
30.0 and above	Obese

To calculate your BMI, ask your physician or log on to www.cdc.gov and type “BMI” in the search engine.

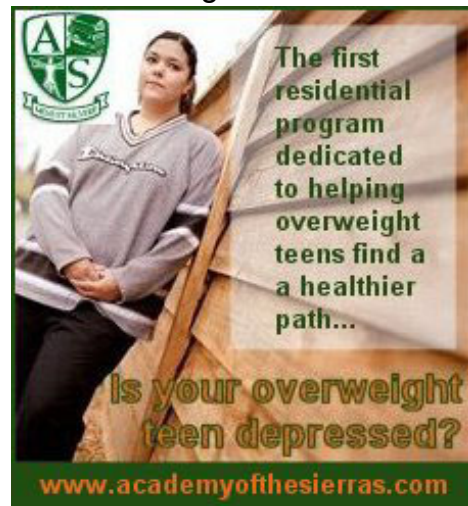
Calculating a child’s BMI is much trickier. This is because children’s body fat varies considerably, according to growth and gender. This is why BMI for children is called “BMI for age” and is gender and age specific. Gender specific growth charts are used to plot BMI for age in children and teens from 2-20 years old. Weight status for these age groups is as follows:

Underweight	BMI for age < 5 th percentile
Normal	BMI for age 5 th percentile to < 85 th percentile
At risk of overweight	BMI for age 85 th percentile to <95 th percentile
Overweight	BMI for age > 95 th percentile

What does percentile mean? If a child is in the 60th percentile, for example, this means that compared to children of the same gender and age, 60% have a lower BMI.

You can ask your family physician or pediatrician to calculate your child's BMI for age or you may log on to www.bcm.edu/cnrc for a children's BMI calculator. If your child falls into any status other than "normal," you should ask your family physician for interpretation and advice. This is because the BMI for age chart is a good, but not perfect tool. For example, while the majority of teen boys with a BMI of over the 85th percentile have excess body fat, some very active athletic teens can have an elevated BMI due to extra muscle mass rather than extra body fat.

If your child is overweight or at risk of overweight, you may already recognize this. But some parents don't. A recent study performed at the New York Medical College Department of Pediatrics found that only 10.5% of parents of overweight children recognized that their children were overweight. While these parents understood the health risks of obesity and had a good knowledge of healthy eating patterns, they simply did not see their child as having a weight problem. The upshot is that it's wise to have your physician plot your child's weight status about every 6 months to determine if weight gain is appropriate.



The Right Attitude

Before reading further, it's important to think about how to approach a healthy eating program for your family. It's essential to present your ideas in a loving and caring way that emphasizes your concern for good health rather than a desire for your child to be thin. Instilling shame, fear or humiliation in an overweight child can make him feel worse about his size and perhaps set up rebellion.

Remember, too, that lifestyle changes can take a long time to become healthy habits. A sudden switch from junk food family to "health nuts" is doomed to failure, whereas a gradual change is often more successful and long lasting.

THE SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL LONG-TERM WEIGHT CONTROL

- 1. Make the decision and commit to weight control as a top priority**
- 2. Understand and accept the enemy: your biology**
- 3. Follow the seven rules of healthy eating**
- 4. Eat well but choose right**
- 5. Move your body**
- 6. Plan and self-monitor daily**
- 7. Understand and manage stress**
- 8. Learn to deal with set backs**

1. Make the decision and commit to weight control as a top priority

People resist change. When you combine this psychological resistance to change with the way your biology resists to weight loss, you have a mighty combination. If you want to succeed at maintaining weight loss over the long term, you must make a firm decision to commit to changes in how you think, eat, and move.

Weight loss cannot be at the bottom of your list of priorities. It must be a top priority to be successful. A truly dedicated commitment to the decision to lose weight and keep it off is essential.

2. Understand and accept the enemy: your biology

Many people who have had a long-term weight issue complain that it is just too hard to lose weight and maintain the loss. They might even say that this is simply because their bodies resist this healthy weight. They are right. However, accepting that indeed your body does resist weight loss and long-term maintenance does not mean you cannot fight this biological fact. Rather than lament your biology, learn everything you can about how to resist your body's resistance. The goal is to accept the enemy, not succumb to it.

Humans were hunter-gatherers for thousands of years. Our feet were our only form of transportation. We spent many hours hunting for food, which was not always in great

abundance. This meant our bodies had to hang on to fat to survive. The hunger-gatherer legacy is still with us in our sedentary fast-food society. In developed countries, we rarely go hungry or use our feet for transportation (other than from the front door to the car), but when we cut back on calories, the feast-or-famine biology kicks in and our bodies resist the loss of fat. Therefore, we must develop strategies to resist this resistance. Permanent weight loss becomes an athletic challenge.

3. Follow the seven rules of eating

Defying our biological resistance requires dedication and commitment. You are fighting your fat cells, hungry beasts who demand being fed. The daily food choices you make can help you control their demands and lose weight.

The seven things that have the most impact on your hunger and weight are:

- Eat Very Little Fat – Go as Low as You Can Go (<20 g per day)
- Control Sugar Consumption
- Eat Lean Sources of Protein, Emphasizing Plant Proteins
- Consume Low-Density Foods (e.g., soups, vegetables)
- Eat Fiber-Rich Foods (at least 30 g per day)
- Eat Your Calories – Don't Drink Them
- Stay Calorie Conscious

Rule 1: Eat Very Little Fat

Your body is a very efficient machine when it comes to storing fat in the body. If you eat high-fat foods, you make this an even more efficient process. Your body only needs to expend 3 calories of energy to turn 100 calories of very high fat food into body fat. This means 97 of the 100 calories end up in your fat cells. However, your body expends about 23 calories to turn 100 calories of a carbohydrate into fat. By eating high-fat foods you make a tough situation tougher: you are making it very easy for those hungry fat cells to store more fat. This process of storing fat is even more efficient in overweight people than in people who have never been overweight.

The transition to a low-fat diet might seem very difficult at first, but successful weight controllers report that after they become acclimated to the new lower-fat diet, they find that high-fat foods taste greasy and overly rich. Successful weight controllers experiment with various spices, salsa, and fat-free condiments to make their low-fat choices flavorful and delicious.

Successful long-term weight control can only be achieved if you refuse to feed your fat cells the exact thing they want: more fat. You will only need 3-5 grams of fat a day to maintain nutritional health.

Rule 2: Control Sugar Consumption

We love sugar. The sweet taste of cakes, cookies, and ice cream has become intimately associated with the celebrations of life, from holidays to birthdays to weddings. Just as our biology explains the resistance to fat loss, it explains our infatuation with sugar.

As hunter-gatherers we instinctively knew (or learned through experience) that sweetness equaled safe-to-eat. If a berry tasted bitter or sour, it was more likely to be poisonous. You could say that having a “sweet tooth” was a biological necessity for survival. This biological set-up goes even further: once the hunter-gatherer found a sweet food, the body encouraged them to eat large quantities of it. In a feast-or-famine environment, it would be very important to eat as much as you could of a safe food because you could not be sure when you would find your next meal.

We also have all experienced that quick burst of energy you get after eaten sugar-laden foods. Sugar is composed of glucose, which is also the chemical that is the primary source of energy in your body. Studies show that when humans or animals are starving, they prefer sweet foods. You may have noticed that when you are extremely hungry you gravitate toward the “quick fix” of a cookie or other sugary food.

These biological processes create a vicious circle: you get very hungry and grab sugary foods; the sugary foods trigger biochemical reactions that increase your hunger and encourage you to indulge more.

Studies on the impact of sugar on energy levels have shown that this effect drops off soon after eating sugar-laden foods. However, the increased energy that comes after a brisk walk can be sustained for much longer. Sugar consumption also stimulates the release of serotonin, a natural tranquilizer. You may have noticed that about an hour after eating drinks or foods with a large amount of sugar that you feel lethargic. This often triggers another round of eating more sugar-laden foods.

Because sugary foods have become so associated with holidays and other celebrations, it can be very difficult to break this habit. However, if you realize that you are defeating your enemy by not eating these foods, you can find alternatives such as fruit and low-sugar crackers to ward off cravings for sugary foods.

Rule 3: Eat Lean Sources of Protein

Proteins are the building blocks of life and they are an essential part of your diet. You have probably read many conflicting stories about the value of protein in a weight-loss program, with recommendations ranging from 40 g to as many as 120 grams a day. Before deciding on the right amount of protein, it is important to understand the role it plays in your body.

Successful long-term weight controllers should eat relatively high levels of proteins for a number of reasons. Protein stimulates the release of the digestive hormone CCK, which in turn stimulates the release of neurotransmitters that make you feel satisfied and full.

Proteins stabilize your blood glucose levels, which also regulates feelings of hunger. The complexity of protein molecules translates into slower digestion. This means your blood glucose levels remain more stable and you are less likely to feel hunger for a longer period of time. Proteins make you feel more satisfied than carbohydrates. It is important to spread your protein intake over the whole day, beginning with breakfast. Choose lean proteins that are low in fat for the most effective weight loss.

We suggest 70-100 grams of protein spread over the day. Good choices are egg substitutes (egg whites), buffalo steak (a low-fat alternative to beef), skim milk, fat-free yogurt, Special K cereal (11 g of protein), fat-free cottage cheese, chicken, turkey, or Boca burgers.

Rule 4: Consume Low-Density Foods

Low-density foods are foods where you get a lot of food for relatively fewer calories. Examples of low-density foods are soups (you consume lots of liquid), vegetables, fruits, and very low-fat foods.

High-density foods include chocolate, pastries, and cheeses: a small serving size equals a lot of calories.

Soups can be great appetite-reducers for weight controllers. Studies have shown that adding more fluid to the diet (but not more calories) reduces overall caloric intake. One study that included around 1,800 participants showed that those who consumed more soup had better weight loss results.

A great book on low-density eating is Volumetrics by Dr. Barbara Rolls. Dr. Rolls compared weight-loss results for diners who ate more low-density foods such as salads with low-fat dressing with those of diners who ate low-fat, yet high-density foods such as pretzels and baked chips. She found that those who ate the low-density foods lost 50% more weight.

You can figure out the density of a food by dividing the calories of one serving by the weight of that serving in grams. A 100-calorie food that weight 6 ounces will be twice as high in density as a 100-calorie food that weighs 3 ounces. The goal is to include more foods with a density of less than 1, such as most fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products. Foods with densities greater than 2 tend to be high in fat, such as fried foods and high-fat meats.

Rule 5: Eat Fiber-Rich Foods

Fiber is one of the best tools in your arsenal. Fiber not only makes you feel full, it has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. Very few Americans eat enough fiber. In fact, most eat less than half the recommended amount of fiber in a given day. Countries where people consume a lot of fiber have significantly lower rates of obesity.

Fiber does not sound like a very appetizing food choice – instead of thinking about the fiber, think about the foods that have lots of it: fresh vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Many high-fiber foods are also low-density foods, so by choosing these high-fiber choices you are keeping two rules with one food.

There are many simple changes you can make to increase your fiber consumption. Instead of turkey on white bread have turkey on whole grain bread and add lettuce, tomatoes, and a slice of cucumber. The vegetables add very few calories and the bread won't change the calories at all, yet you have just added about 6 grams of fiber to your meal, one-fifth of the daily minimum requirement of 30 grams.

You can increase your fiber intake by choosing whole grain breads instead of white breads, brown rice instead of white rice, and whole fruits instead of juices. To meet your daily fiber requirement you will need to add quite a few vegetables to your diet. You will find these foods keep you feeling satisfied and full throughout the day, greatly increasing your chances of success as a long-term weight controller.

Rule 6: Eat Your Calories – Don't Drink Them

High-calorie drinks such as sodas, fruit juices, and sports drinks can quickly undermine your weight loss, especially if you guzzle such drinks to quench your thirst. You can easily add more than 500 calories to your daily diet by drinking one soda, a fruit juice, and a frozen coffee drink. For some reason, many people simply don't bother to count the calories in drinks. In recent years, juice bars have become very popular. Many fruit smoothies contain more than 300 calories and over 50 grams of sugar.

It is particularly important that children be taught to eat their calories. Children are constantly bombarded with advertising that encourages them to drink sugar-filled juice drinks and sodas. A Harvard study showed that for every additional sugared drink a child consumed their risk for developing obesity increased by a stunning 60%. Most fruit drinks contain very little actual fruit juice, and even those that are 100% fruit juice contain almost no fiber.

The only exception to this rule is skim milk. Skim milk contains protein and calcium, and some research has shown that dairy products may help you lose weight.

Rule 7: Stay Calorie Conscious

Even if you follow the first six rules, successful weight control also depends on how many calories you take in and how many you expend. This is simply a natural law: to lose weight you must use more energy than you consume. To maintain a weight you must have an even balance between the two.

If you implement the first six rules and find you are losing weight, you have found the right balance. If you are not losing weight, you will need to either cut back on your food intake or increase your activity.

One general rule of thumb that will help you regulate your daily caloric intake is to limit your largest meal of the day to 800 calories. Most men eat more than 2500 calories a day, and most women now eat more than 1900 calories a day. To be a serious weight controller, you will need to eat far fewer calories.

4. Eat Well but Choose Right

Many overweight people find themselves so enamored with certain foods that they cannot imagine no longer eating them. They will say they “crave” chocolate or “love” ice cream. Because many of the most calorie-dense foods are associated with happy events, such as parties, birthdays, and holidays, we have made associations that equate cookies, cakes, and ice cream with love, happiness, friendship, and family. Some foods even have a tranquilizing effect on us, calming us when we feel angry, stressed, or upset. However, that calming effect is short-lived, but the effect on our weight continues long after period of indulgences.

It is okay to feel so passionate about food, its flavors and textures, but to be a successful weight controller, you will need to transfer that passion to healthier choices. The worst thing you can do is start eating boiled chicken breast and romaine lettuce with a splash of vinegar for meals. How long do you think you could sustain such a diet? Most people will not last a week.

The first thing you will need to do is understand what qualities in food appeal to you. There are four aspects to food that determine how much you love that food: taste, appearance, smell, and texture. Some people like creamy and sweet, some likely crunchy and salty. Most overweight people know which foods they tend to gravitate toward (and which ones tend to throw any diet plan into a tail spin).

As a weight controller you will want to emphasize the characteristics that please you.

Taste

Some like it hot and spicy, some like it sweet! The four main taste groups are salty, sweet, sour, and bitter. When you eat, focus on the flavors of your food. There are many low-fat condiments that can make food taste more like the flavors you prefer. In most grocery stores you will see bottle after bottle of seasonings and flavor enhancers, from spice combinations to Worcestershire sauce. Of course, you should read the labels before you buy to make sure they are fat free.

Appearance

We are attracted to foods that look appealing. If you have ever eaten in a five-star restaurant, you know that they pay as much attention to the presentation of the meal as they do the taste of the meal. Why not serve your meal so it looks like it came out of the kitchen of a top-notch restaurant?

You can also make the eating experience more pleasurable by setting the table with nice plates and silverware. Maybe even add some candles or put a bowl of healthy fruits in the middle of the table to make the setting more appealing. Make every meal a pleasant, appealing sight and you will feel more satisfied.

Smells

Sometimes we are so anxious to dive into a meal that we forget to savor the smells of that freshly grilled chicken or fish. Savor the smells of your food before you begin eating.

Texture

Pay attention to how the food feels in your mouth when you eat it: the creamy texture of nonfat yogurt, the crunchy fresh snap of a carrot stick.

The goal is to focus on the characteristics of food that appeal to you and recognize that many of the factors that appealed to you when you were eating high-fat, densely caloric foods are also present in the healthy, low-fat choices.

You will also discover some new foods that can become healthy substitutes for choices from your overweight past. Sweet potatoes are often cited as one of the best new healthy choices: they have certain sweetness, a creamy texture, and evoke memories of the holidays. Sweet potatoes have great nutritional value and are very filling.

It is okay to love foods – you just want to make sure you choose foods that will love you back!

5. Move Your Body

Remember our discussion earlier about hunter-gatherers and how this biological legacy sets us up to store fat? This biological legacy also sets up to gain weight if we do not move our bodies. Without physical activity our muscles strength begins to diminish. Less muscle means less efficient burning of calories. Less efficient burning of calories means we are prone, once again, to storing fat. We put energy in our bodies in the form of calories, and we expend it through activity.

Many people believe they understand the relationship between activity and weight, but in fact, there are quite a few common misconceptions. People believe it takes a lot of exercise to burn calories, but even moderate exercise on a daily basis burns calories. At Academy of the Sierras, the first residential treatment program for obese teens,

students wear a pedometer and have a goal of at least 10,000 steps a day. Many of the students feel overwhelmed by the goal at first, but within time many are finding they can easily reach 15,000 steps and even much more throughout the day.

Small changes in your activity can add to your fat-burning ability, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking a little farther away at the mall can add to your fat-burning potential throughout the day. You burn approximate the same number of calories walking three miles as you do running three miles, so you don't have to become a marathon runner to see results through activity.

Many people believe exercise increases their appetite. While this might be true if you are exercising at the level of an athlete, moderate exercise can actually decrease appetite.

One of the great benefits of daily exercise is that your metabolic rate remains high and your body expends more energy all day. The benefits of exercise are not limited to the time when you are actually walking, swimming, or playing tennis.

Exercise helps weight controllers stay on track not only by increasing weight loss, but also by improving stress management, quality of sleep, digestion, self-esteem, resistance to illness, agility, appetite control, and muscle tone. Exercise really is the only miracle pill for weight loss!

Weight controllers will achieve the best overall results if they integrate some form of exercise into their daily schedule. It is also easier to stick with an exercise plan if you make it a natural part of every day. To help you stick to a daily exercise plan, choose something that is convenient, appealing, and has some social aspects. For many people, walking is the most convenient way to get in daily activity. If you have nice parks or interesting neighborhood streets nearby the only thing you have to do is put on your sneakers and open the front door to get to your workout. If you can find a walking partner who will commit to joining you every day, you will find you don't want to let this person down, and will have fewer excuses for not showing up. If you decide to walk alone, listen to music. Research has shown that people walk more vigorously when listening to music.

If you find walking boring, but love dance, consider joining a dance aerobics class. If you enjoy swimming, find a local YMCA as prices are generally reasonable. If you do decide to join a gym, it is a good idea to join one as close to home as possible. Long commutes to the gym may mean lots of excuses about actually going.

You don't need to wear yourself exercising. Your intensity level should allow you to complete a full 30 minutes of the activity. However, if you find that you have difficulty sustaining any sort of activity for 30 minutes, divide your exercise into two 15-minute sessions. You have probably heard that you need to maintain your target heart rate for at least 20 minutes to burn calories. However, once you begin exercising, you begin using calories. The difference is that at the beginning of exercise your body burns

glucose, but after an extended time, you begin burning fat. However, as your body works to replenish glucose, it will always need to dip into the energy reserves of fat. This means you can burn fat whether you exercise for one 30-minute session or two 15-minute sessions.

It is important when you begin an exercise regimen that you not overdo it at first and risk injuring yourself. Start at a pace you can handle, then add a few minutes each day. Always stretch and warm up before you begin exercising, and be sure to stretch during the cool down period as well.

6. Plan and Self-Monitor Daily

We've all heard the rule about never grocery shopping while you are hungry. Unplanned things seem to pop into the shopping cart. Not planning what you will eat throughout the day or week is like going grocery shopping when you are hungry.

Planning in advance your meals and snacks will help you avoid situations where you are very hungry and unprepared – sudden hunger 'emergencies' can result in impulsive drive-through visits or eating whatever is available so quickly you forget to count it as part of your daily intake.

Planning is the first step in the most important part of any successful weight control plan: self-monitoring. Study after study has shown it: weight controllers who write down what they eat and when they exercise are the most successful in losing and maintaining weight. Those who self-monitor generally lose more weight, have fewer set backs, maintain weight for longer periods of time, and maintain weight during highly stressful periods when food temptations abound, such as holiday gatherings.

Weight controllers who keep a written record of their daily eating and exercise tend to feel more committed to real changes in their lifestyle. The written record allows you to understand where you might need to improve your diet. It also allows you to set goals and meet them, which promotes self-esteem as you celebrate successful milestones. Imagine watching your exercise record go from 5000 steps a day to 15000 steps a day! When you look back at how tough those 5000 steps used to be, you will feel a great sense of accomplishment that you are now easily doing three times as many steps.

By keeping a food journal, you will have something to refer to should your weight loss efforts seem to be slowing down. Maybe you added a bread serving more days than you realized? Maybe you ate fewer vegetables one week, which might explain why you felt hungrier than usual all week and ended up eating a few things that were not part of your healthy weight control plan.

When you record your food choices, be sure to indicate portion size. Creeping portion growth can be the downfall of any weight control plan. If you don't have a scale or

measuring utensil available, remember there are some easy “visual clues” to determine the size of a serving. For example:

Medium Orange = Tennis Ball

3 oz of Meat = Deck of Cards

1 oz Cheese = A 3.5” Computer Disk (thin-sliced cheese)

It will be even more helpful if you purchase a pocket-sized calorie counter than includes information on fat grams per serving. By recording this information in your food journal, you will be aware of the times of day when you seem to need the most calories, and you can plan your daily meals accordingly.

Self-monitoring keeps you focused on your goals and makes you acutely aware of your eating and exercise habits – the healthy ones and the ones that tend to sabotage your progress. The longer you self-monitor, the more “history” you will have that can help you in the future should you become frustrated or get off track. You can refer back to a time when you felt successful and satisfied and re-trace your steps through your food and exercise journal.

There are times when self-monitoring will mean the difference between successful weight control and self-sabotage. Any time food temptations abound, such as at office parties, birthdays, holidays, or in restaurants, self-monitoring can help you stay on track and stay aware of the choices you are making. By accurately recording what you eat – even when you really don’t want to admit you ate it – you avoid the self-deception and denial that can spell the end of successful weight control.

7. Understand and Manage Stress

Most people who struggle with their weight certainly understand the role that stress plays in their patterns of eating. The goal of any serious weight controller is to learn how to deal with stress in new ways and to make sure that if you do overeat when under stress you do not choose foods that will put you back in a weight-gain spiral.

Dr. Dan Kirschenbaum, Clinical Director of [Health Living Academies](#), suggests that if you do deviate from your food plan, you deviate QUANTITATIVELY and not QUALITATIVELY. This means you continue to choose healthy, nutritious foods rather than start going “back” to high-fat, calorie-dense foods such as pizza, cookies, and other foods that tend to lead to long-term binges.

One of the main reasons it is important not to start eating high-fat, sugary foods during these high-stress periods is that it gives you a taste for those foods again. When you have avoided pizza and ice cream for many months, you will find them too rich and fatty. However, if you start to re-introduce them into your eating plan, you will begin to crave them on a regular basis.

As a committed weight controller, you will want to focus on “safe foods” that will not undermine your long-term goals. Part of the process of losing weight is developing strategies in advance that will help you get through challenging events and periods of your life. How you view your weight control commitment will have a great amount of influence on how you deal with stress. If you view weight control in a negative light, it will be much easier to convince yourself that you “deserve treats.” If you view weight control in a positive light, it will be much easier to convince yourself that you “deserve health.”

8. Learn to Deal with Set Backs

Weight loss and long-term weight management rarely happens in a linear fashion. Every weight controller will struggle with temptation, old habits, and times when the scale won't seem to budge. It is important that you set realistic goals as well as workable plans for those “rough” days. For example, if you eat the wrong foods or too many foods one day, you have a plan to write down every extra calorie and then figure out how you will work that off with exercise the next day.

Dr. Kirschenbaum of Healthy Living Academies often talks about the “Honeymoon Stage.” This is when you are highly motivated at the beginning of a diet – you are seeing results, feeling great, walking and moving more – you feel as if nothing can stop you. This stage does not last forever. Temptations – not only to eat the “old way” but to sit on the couch and watch TV instead of taking that walk around the neighborhood – are bound to occur. Studies show that the longer you follow a healthy plan with daily self-monitoring, the easier it gets to stick to it. You will begin to really feel it when you don't exercise – many report they feel down or depressed if they miss a couple of days of working out. Your body and mind begin to accept the new healthy lifestyle and over time you will find yourself developing strategies to keep yourself on track.

If you are aware of the types of events or situations that can trip you up, you will not need to beat yourself up – you will instead have an arsenal of weapons against these pitfalls or slumps. Here are the main issues that tend to sabotage weight controllers:

1. Expecting to be perfect all the time: if you have unrealistic expectations about your ability to never eat that fattening food or never overeat at a school party, you may turn a temporary lapse into a longer relapse. Accept a temporary set back and immediately start back with self-monitoring and exercise. Consider each day a new beginning.
2. Injuries or illnesses can set you back. You have just worked up to 4 miles a day and you pull your hamstring. The doctor says you need to keep off the leg for a few weeks. Re-assess your caloric intake when you cannot do the same workout; find ways to still exercise – in this case you could do your upper body,

abdominal, and other exercises that don't involve the injured leg. Don't expect to exercise at the same level of intensity when you have healed. It may take a few weeks to build up your cardiovascular fitness again if you have been out of commission for a while. Accept this and do not berate yourself as this can lead to giving up.

3. **Avoiding the Scale:** It is not a good sign when you don't want to get on the scale. This can often lead to self-deception and a self-fulfilling prophecy. The longer you avoid the scale, the more damage you might see when you finally realize you are sliding down the slippery slope of weight gain.
4. **Vacations and special events:** when you change your schedule or attend events where you are not as in control of the foods served, it can be easy to throw the diet out completely. Continue self-monitoring throughout the vacation. At special events, find the crudités (raw vegetables) and fill up on those before even thinking about the other choices. Most hotels have a gym and swimming pool – use them. If you are vacationing in a new area, take a nice long walk to get to know the area. You can ask a hotel concierge if there are any designated walking paths in the area.
5. **Major changes in relationships:** breaking up a relationship, finding out someone has been dishonest, learning that you are failing an important class – these are all events that can be unsettling or even devastating. Increase your cardio workouts to deal with stress – the neurobiological impact of exercise can be a great friend during times of emotional crisis. Again, continue your self-monitoring, even if you are far from perfect. You are still a weight controller, even when it isn't going as well as you'd like.
6. **Financial Stress:** Very few people are immune to the stress of money issues. At some point most people have to deal with this. Teens are not immune to the financial stresses of their parents. If your family is going through a difficult time financially, reassure your children and help them focus on maintaining a healthy eating plan. Exercise will better enable your child, and you, to deal with any financial crises.
7. **Medications:** some medicines make people feel tired or sluggish. You should never simply accept the way a medication makes you feel without discussing other options with your doctor. You might simply be on a medication that is not right for you. Many medications prescribed to children have been tested mainly in adults. Ask your child to keep notes on any changes they notice if they are on medication – they can add this to their self-monitoring journal. It is important that you maintain an open dialogue with your physician. As a person now focused on long-term health, you have a right to be intimately involved with medical decisions that impact your quality of life and that of your children.

The one thing successful long-term weight controllers have in common is the ability to face problems head on versus trying to escape or avoid the problems. They also tend to reach out for support from others more often than people who tend to regain their weight.

If you do have a slump or fall into old patterns, the important thing to do is get back on track as soon as possible. If you self-monitor every day, this will be easier. You have certainly heard about 12-step programs. In those programs, members do not say “I will never do X again!” They say instead, “Today I will not do X.” Those who successfully stay in recovery from addiction will say again and again, “It is one day at a time.” Why is this important? Psychologists have described a phenomenon called the “Abstinence Violation Effect” or AVE. People who set unrealistic expectations that they will never again for the rest of their lives do something are devastated by a set back. It is harder for these people to get back on the road to recovery again. Therefore, 12-steppers stay in the moment. How does this translate to weight control? What you did yesterday occurred yesterday. Today you are starting fresh. So you ate chocolate cookies last night. Today you do not eat chocolate cookies and you add 20 minutes to the elliptical workout. Weight controllers who think this way are more successful over the long run. Those who say, “I ate cookies last night so I may as well eat donuts for breakfast because I am a failure,” create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As a parent, you do not want to unwittingly become the person who creates this feeling that one mistake is the end of weight control. Nagging your teen or commenting on their food in a way that insults or demeans them can be a trigger for defiant or self-destructive behavior.

TV, Video Games, and Computers

Most adults today were probably much more active as children. There were only a handful of television channels, home video games were not exciting enough to merit four straight hours of play, and computers were mainly for business use. Today's children have plenty of ways to distract and amuse themselves without moving any major muscle groups. Their fingers are the only things staying in shape as they type on the keyboard or slam buttons on a video game console.

The biggest culprit in today's sedentary lifestyle is the television. In a typical American household, the TV set is on for more than 7 hours per day! TV viewing often begins prior to age 2 and has been connected with poor grades, sleep disorders, behavior problems, and obesity. It also encourages unhealthy eating habits, since children's advertising does not typically give good information about healthy food choices, plus children are inclined to snack while watching TV.

Research has shown that children who watch television 10 hours or more per week are more likely to be overweight. This is due in part to a lowered metabolic rate while sitting still. In fact, a 15-year old girl who weighs 100 pounds would burn 45 calories per hour of TV watching—only 4 calories per hour more than if she were sleeping! This means that if a child watches TV for 5 hours per day and sleeps for 8 hours per day, 13 of her 24 hours are sedentary. Other activities, such as video games, computer time, talking on the telephone, and even reading and doing homework—all add up to a great deal of time during which few calories are burned.

Of course, some sedentary time is unavoidable, even desirable. But there are ways to limit this by making healthy lifestyle changes to decrease sedentary time and increase time spent moving. Some ideas are:

- Make specific rules about the amount of TV time allowed. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines recommend that TV viewing be no more than one to two hours per day at most. Better yet, no TV during the week and limited TV time during the weekend.
- Consider having the television and computer in a central spot in the main living area of your house, rather than in bedrooms. This makes it less likely that children will retire to their bedrooms to sit for long periods of time.
- Put your exercise bike or treadmill in front of the television. Some families have rules that family members must take turns exercising during television programs.

Good TV Habits

- Don't leave the TV on for background noise
- Don't expect your child to restrict TV viewing if you don't have self-discipline when it comes to TV viewing
- Use a TV guide to decide which shows to watch rather than channel surfing. Watch only the selected show then turn the TV off before your child becomes interested in another program
- Spend your free time exercising, pursuing hobbies, or playing with your child

- Instead of putting the children in front of the TV while you make dinner, have them help out with food preparation and table setting.
- Instead of phoning a friend who lives nearby, encourage your child to meet her friend for a walk.
- Plan children's play dates around an activity rather than allowing them to gravitate toward the TV or video games.

Obesity, Health, and Your Community

Health promotion is a community effort. And there are many things that can be done within the community to advocate for a healthier environment for your children and their peers. If your children are very young and attend a daycare or preschool setting that participates in a federally funded food program, these foods must meet national standards for nutrition. But what about foods that parents bring for parties, outings, and other events? You can work with program personnel to encourage all parents to bring in healthy treats. Cut up fruit with yogurt dip or graham crackers dipped in applesauce are both appealing and nutritious. For children over age 4, trail mix, toasted pumpkin seeds or low fat popcorn are great alternatives.

In addition to healthy foods, encourage your preschool or daycare program leaders to schedule lots of outdoor play and active outings, such as nature walks or a trip to a children's museum. And don't forget to volunteer your help!

Parents of school aged children can get involved, too. Help your child by planning ahead for healthy school lunch selections. When it's your turn to take the treats for soccer practice or a birthday party, bring healthy ones. And work with the school to ensure a healthy environment for all children by joining decision-making groups such as a school wellness committee. If your child's school doesn't have one, it may soon. In 2004, Congress signed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, making it mandatory for all schools and agencies that participate in the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to develop school wellness policies by fall of 2006.

These policies are to address issues such as providing healthy food and beverage options throughout the school, as well as providing daily physical activity—in an effort to promote a healthier environment and prevent childhood obesity. Subsequently, many schools have developed wellness committees comprised of school personnel, parents, students, and administration to discuss and take action on such things as:

- Policies encouraging acceptance of weight and size diversity as well as intolerance for teasing or harassment of others; such policies promote self-confidence, respect and safety for all students. How can teachers, coaches and others discuss health habits rather than body build in their efforts to control overweight and obesity?

- Vending machines: While it's federally mandated that vending machines offering non-nutritious foods and beverages be turned off during school lunch hours, what about other times of the school day? Should vending machines be on during any part of the school day? Before and after school? Where should vending machines be placed within the school and what kinds of food and beverage options should be available? Should the public have a chance to review vending machine contracts prior to their approval by the school board?
- Policies addressing nutrition guidelines for foods that fall outside of the NSLP nutrition guidelines, such as a la carte foods and foods offered through fundraisers as well as foods brought into the classroom for rewards (such as a pizza party) or special events.
- How to incorporate physical activity into the daily schedule of all students without taking away from academics.
- Coordinating curriculum on healthy living so that information presented in various classes reinforces material learned.

The best way to have some control of what is happening in your child's school environment is to get involved! One web site with good resources for improving the school environment for your child's health is www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.

Professional Help

Now that you've read the secrets you might be wondering, "what if I do all of these things, and nothing works?" First, remember to give a healthier lifestyle some time. Most professionals agree that healthy habits take time, and that children should be allowed to "grow into" their current weight as they get taller rather than lose weight rapidly. And most children who have an "energy imbalance," that is, they are eating more calories than they expend in physical activity—will gradually slim down, once they begin expending more calories than they take in.

New Help for Obese Teens

[Academy of the Sierras](http://www.healthylivingacademies.com), the first residential treatment program and boarding school for overweight and obese teens ages 13-18, opened in California in 2004. It is a place where teens who are struggling with their weight can turn their lives around. The first year results for students attending the Academy were remarkable, with an average weight loss of 84 pounds. Academy of the Sierras is part of Healthy Living Academies, which also runs healthy weight loss summer camps for children, teens, and young adult women. To learn more, visit <http://www.healthylivingacademies.com>.

But there are some children who should be considered for professional help for overweight. These are children who are more than thirty pounds overweight, or those children with symptoms of "disordered eating," which is a condition in which emotional issues contribute to overeating. Children with disordered eating patterns use food to

soothe themselves and meet their emotional needs. How can you tell if your child has a disordered eating problem? You may notice:

- Preoccupation with food and the next meal, perhaps even sneaking food between meals or hoarding food; denial if confronted.
- Eating rapidly and in large amounts, yet complaining of hunger afterwards.
- An excessive concern with body shape, attempts to restrict food intake, then eventually overeating again.
- Frequent negative comments about self.
- Isolation of self, complaining that other children don't like him or want to play with him.
- Seeming lonely or even depressed.
- Overeating and weight gain associated with a significant traumatic event, such as a divorce or death of a loved one.

Any child who exhibits one or more of these symptoms should be taken to her doctor for a physical exam. A small percentage of children may have a physical disorder, such as hypothyroidism, which may be contributing to overweight. Your child's doctor can also perform an evaluation for disordered eating and refer you to a mental health professional who specializes in overeating, or a program, camp or school that deals exclusively with overweight children, many of whom have underlying problems contributing to their weight issue.

Choosing the Right Program

Whether you choose an organized professional weight loss program for children such as Shapedown (www.shapedown.com), or a residential [weight loss camp](#) or school such as those offered by Healthy Living Academies (www.healthylivingacademies.com), make sure that your child is part of the decision. Dragging a child to a "fat camp" can only trigger rebellion and shame, and ultimately harm self-esteem.

If your child is interested in attending a program, whether it is a class setting or a residential treatment program, check for these essential elements:

- **Family based-** The program should involve the whole family and if residential, address a plan for maintaining weight loss after it is finished.

- **Menus are consistent with national guidelines for healthy diet and exercise.**
- **Developmentally based-** Program should be based upon cognitive, physical and emotional needs of your child's age group.
- **Addresses underlying factors that contribute to overweight-** such as self-esteem issues or depression.
- **Provides for recreation and fun** while learning.
- **Staff are well qualified** in the field of dietetics, physical education, therapy, and so on.

What about Weight Loss Camps?

Anecdotal evidence suggests well over 90% of campers who attend typical diet camps that do not include a scientifically based behavioral-change program, gain all the weight back and then some within the first year. It makes great business sense for the diet camps, who urge campers to return the following summer. However, it makes no sense for the campers, who experience years of successive failures. Prior to the establishment of Wellspring Camps in 2004, no weight loss camp available to the public provided any clinical behavioral change program to empower participants to sustain the weight loss beyond camp.

At present, **Wellspring Camps and Academy of the Sierras summer session** are the only summer programs that fit the bill. These are excellent programs if you're interested in helping your child break the cycle of summer weight loss followed by fall and winter weight gain. Visit www.wellspringcamps.com to learn more.

You Can Succeed

After reading this book, your family should soon be on its way to a healthier lifestyle. Remember that the steps you take toward improving your health should be considered permanent changes—lifelong habits that will help you to maintain a healthy weight, whether you're 9—or 90. Over time, these changes will feel natural, and probably desirable. Eventually, you may not even remember your life being any other way. Or more likely, you won't want it to be any other way!



Academy of the Sierras is the FIRST residential program and boarding school for overweight teens. First-year students lost an average of 84 pounds. For more information visit AcademyoftheSierras.com or call **866.364.0808**.

About the Author

Linda Hepler, BSN, RN has been a nurse for over twenty years, spending much of this time working in a residential school for teens, where she became interested in teaching about healthy eating. She lives with her husband, daughter and 4 year old grandson in northern Michigan.

Much of the research for this book was based on the work of Dr. Dan Kirschenbaum. **Dr. Kirschenbaum, Ph.D.**, is Clinical Director of Healthy Living Academies and a professor at Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago. He has developed several very successful weight loss programs affiliated with hospitals, has been a consultant for the U.S. Olympic Committee, Weight Watchers, Novartis Nutrition, and is a Past President of the Division of Exercise and Sport Psychology of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Kirschenbaum is the author of over 100 articles in scientific journals and eight books, including Treatment of Childhood and Adolescent Obesity and the 9 Truths About Weight Loss, the latter unanimously endorsed by the Board of Directors of the American Council on Exercise as "the best book ever written for the public on how to lose weight and keep it off."

