

## Entertainment & Living

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### HEALTH

# Weight Watchers for kids

Study finds whole family has to eat well and exercise to help children drop pounds

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LIVING REPORTER

While Kris Pettit lost more than 100 pounds in the past 2-1/2 years, her family fell in love with whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

When her two little girls want a treat, "They ask for berries," says the London, Ont.-area nurse.

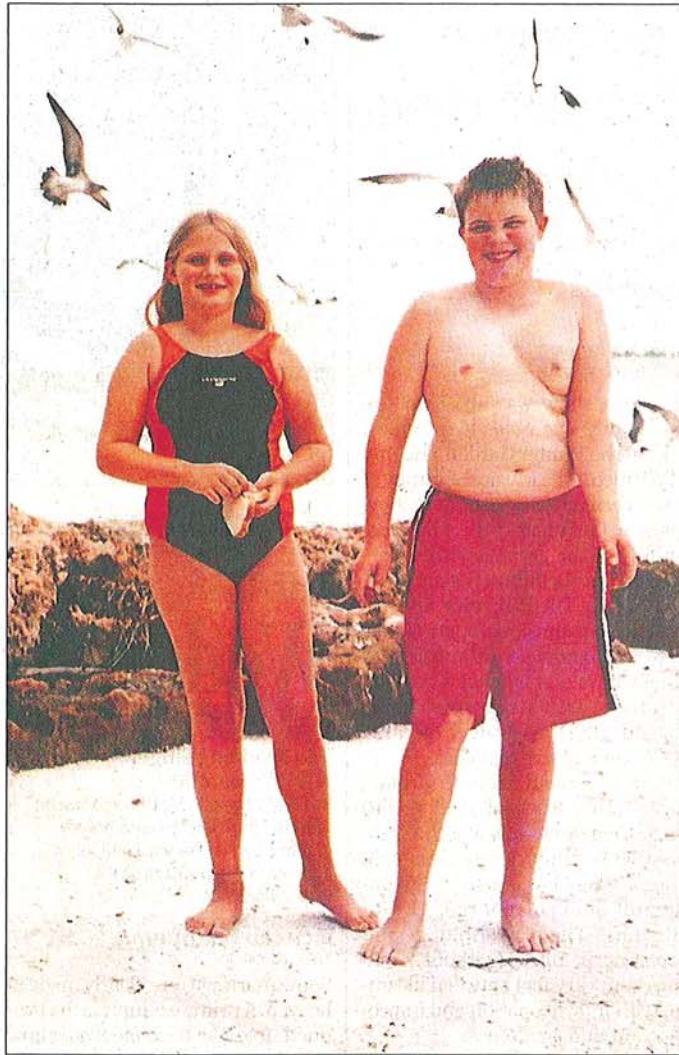
"They know what healthy eating is," says Pettit, adding the family dairy farm provides lots of exercise.

Pettit joined Weight Watchers to lose her weight and her family benefited from her healthy food choices, she says. Her husband also lost 30 pounds.

Pettit's husband told her: "You have done so much for this family."

Fighting fat isn't a one-person job — it's a family responsibility that can directly affect overweight children, reveals a new study by Weight Watchers U.S., one of many organizations responding to the child obesity crisis in North America.

The four-year Weight Watchers' Family Pilot Program, which included 114 children — 67 girls, 47 boys at an average age of 10.3 years — did not involve calorie-counting and wasn't directed at children but rather the entire family. Sixty-eight of the kids attained a healthy weight and maintained it for a year, another



Audrey and Logan Clark, on a Florida beach, before their mom signed the whole family up in 2004 for a U.S. Weight Watchers pilot program.

er 12 already had healthy weights, one child's weight remained the same and 33 kids had slight weight increases.

Parents concerned about their children's weight attended weekly group meetings to problem-solve, learn about nutrition and healthy eating strategies, and were asked to adhere to five basic rules: eat nutritious food; limit treats; maximum two hours' screen time a day after

homework; one daily hour of activity; and everyone in the family follows the same rules.

"Parents often see their roles as enforcers, telling children they can only have this much of a certain food or no desserts. That doesn't work," says nutritionist Karen Miller-Kovach, who ran the pilot program from 2005 to 2009 in Florida.

FAMILY EFFORT continued on E7

# 'Parents have to walk the talk'

FAMILY EFFORT from E1

Instead, the parental focus was changed "to one of provider. Don't have high-calorie foods in the house rather than saying, 'You can't have that,'" she says.

Parents are also role models who greatly affect their children's behaviour, says Miller-Kovach.

She adds that it just isn't fair if an overweight child is denied foods that others have, or is sent off to exercise by himself.

"Parents have to walk the talk," agrees Sharon Brodovsky, senior manager of the Ontario Heart and Stroke Foundation's year-old, child-focused Spark program (Spark Together for Healthy Kids).

"We are physically active together," says Brodovsky, who models a healthy lifestyle at home.

"We are foodies, we like to eat and we like to cook," she adds. "It's not fast food. The kids cook with us."

Her daughters, Talia and Juliana Duarte, ages 10 and 6, read food labels and talk about nutrition, she says, adding, "We should bring home ec (economics) back into schools. We need to teach life skills."

By the time children graduate from school, "they should know where food comes from and how to cook," she says.

Parents have to get a "broader definition of health," she says, and not just worry about weight.

"Walk around the block as a family as opposed to driving someone off to dance class."

Dr. Tom Warshawski, chair of Canada's Childhood Obesity Foundation, is a pediatrician who treats obese children. The foundation's key tenets — five servings of fruits and vegetable daily, no more than two hours of screen time, one hour of activity and zero sugar beverages — are similar to the Weight Watchers family program.

He tells families the single most important thing they can do is get rid of sugary drinks including pop, fruit drinks and energy drinks.

Parents "wouldn't allow a child to have a couple of cigarettes a day but they allow four hours of TV."

Obesity has to be tackled together, he says. "Families are a unit."

Marco Di Buono, director of research at the foundation, says, "The important message is that this is a family thing to tackle together."

Doing activities as a family has the benefit of providing acceptance and support to an overweight child who may be socially isolated, she says.

"Kicking a soccer ball together in the backyard is a lot better than standing on the sidelines of a school team, where they never actually get to play."

Florida housewife Lori Clark was attending Weight Watchers for herself when she volunteered to be in the four-year U.S. family pilot program. Her children, Audrey and Logan, 11 and 15, were already pudgy.

"It was starting to scare me," says Clark. When the family began eating wholesome foods together, Clark says she was relieved she wasn't making a special meal for herself and another for the rest of the family.

"I realized my family needs healthy food, too."

She bought a croquet set and the kids couldn't wait to get outside to the backyard every day and play with her. They walked

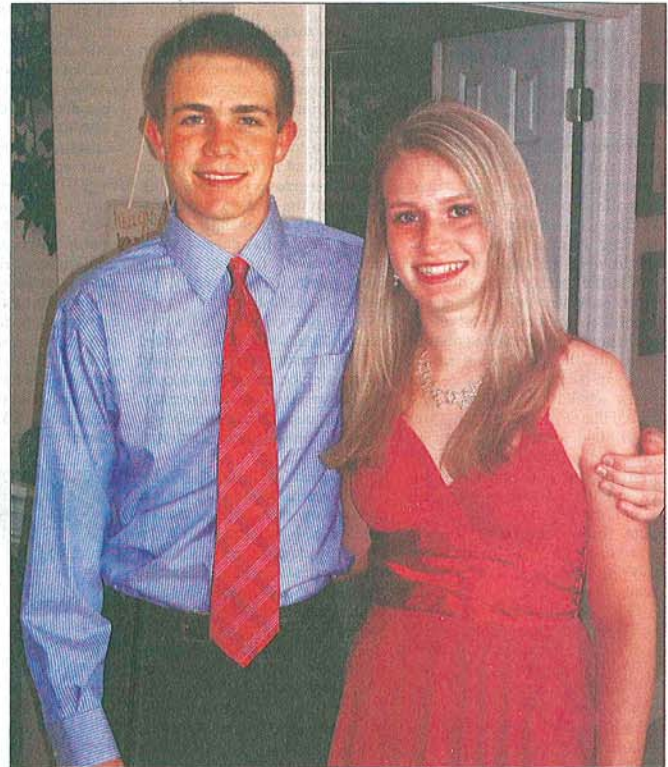


TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR

Sharon Brodovsky and her children Juliana Duarte, 6, left, and Talia Duarte, 10, prepare healthy veggies for dinner.



Audrey Clark was 11, and her brother Logan 15, when their mom started Weight Watchers in 2004 and volunteered the Florida family for the U.S. pilot project.



Logan and sister Audrey, a few years after their mom Lori signed their family up for the Weight Watchers' pilot program. "We made little, slow changes," says Lori, who lost 25 pounds. She adds that her kids understand healthy eating, and "know now what to do."

together, as a family, after supper.

Her kids went to cooking school and she learned to read the labels on foods.

"We made little, slow changes. They know now what to do."

As a result of the study, Weight Watchers has published a book *Eat! Move! Play! A Parents' Guide for Raising Healthy, Happy Kids* (John Wiley & Sons) released in April.