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Obese children crave food and they will do anything to have it

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Pediatric obesity is a complex public health issue that many health professionals find difficult to address and provide relevant treatment. Current practice which recommends an increase in physical activity and a decrease in energy intake is a simple solution for a complex problem. Unfortunately, this simple approach has had little impact on the rates of pediatric obesity. Current pediatric obesogenic environments perpetuate weight gain in children by encouraging over consumption of negative food choices that are high in kilojoules and nutrient poor. The aim of the study was to improve our understanding of the obese child and the role they play in their obesity. Our findings revealed that obese children are highly food focused experiencing hyperphagia that drives their desire for food and perpetuates disordered food behaviors such as self-feeding, stealing food, hiding food, over eating and the use of a wide range of coercive behaviors to acquire the foods they desire. Parents of obese children stated that their children love food, are always hungry, pester them for food repetitively and describe the child as having a food addiction. Food consumes an obese child's life, they think, talk and crave food constantly day after day and placing food restriction only creates negative behaviors. The parents experience arguments, pestering, tantrums, verbal and physical abuse leading to negative psychosocial outcomes for both the child and parent. There needs to be more recognition of an obese child's dependence on negative food choices which leads to the development of disordered food behaviors negatively affecting their weight gain. Furthermore, parents are not equipped with the skill set to cope with the obese child's behavioral issues and therefore health professionals need to be more understanding of the challenges that parents face when they try to reduce food intake and increase physical activity.

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