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the HEALING KITCHEN

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 CATHERINE CASSIDY
 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
 OF A Taste of Home &
 Former Exec. Editor
 of Prevention

*From tea tin to fruit basket,
 breadbox to veggie bin -
 how to unlock the
 curative powers of
 foods that heal!*

ELLEN MICHAUD
With Recipes by Anita Firsiroti, MS, RD

THE HEALING KITCHEN

Ellen Michaud
 with Anita Firsiroti

1-932100-53-9

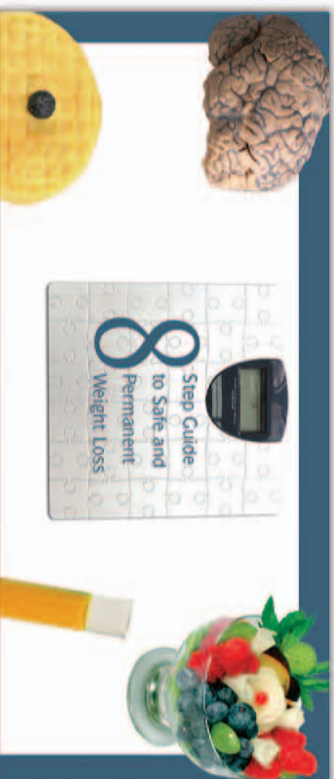
Trade | \$14.95

THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM

Daniel Kirschenbaum, PhD

1-932100-71-7

Hardcover | \$24.95



THE HEALTHY OBSESSION

P R O G R A M

8 Step Guide
 to Safe and
 Permanent
 Weight Loss

Smart Weight Loss

Instead of

Low-Carb Lunacy

DANIEL S. KIRSCHENBAUM, PHD





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Diana Swift
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Dear Diana:

I'm delighted to send you advance review copies of two incredible forthcoming January 2006 titles from BenBella Books: **THE HEALING KITCHEN** and **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM**.

The authors' peers and colleagues have overwhelmingly endorsed their work and their books and hope you and your publication will do the same by reviewing the books or featuring the authors and/or the subject matter. If anything we hope you enjoy the enclosed recipes!

Please review the enclosed materials and galleys and let us know if you have any questions.

Best regards,

Laura Watkins
Director of Marketing and Publicity
Benbella Books, Inc.

P.S. We are also proud to be the publisher of the bestselling *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell, PhD and Thomas M. Campbell II, and have enclosed an excerpt of the introduction for your review. Please let us know if you would like a review copy. Find out what 40,000 readers know that you might not.

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September 28, 2005

Contact: Laura Watkins, Director of Marketing & Publicity
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Step into *The Healing Kitchen*

CREATE HEALTHY BODIES AND MINDS WITH ORDINARY PANTRY ITEMS

Everyone knows that green tea is good for your health, but did you also know that ginger tea is more potent than Dramamine for curing motion sickness or that ginseng tea can help boost athletic endurance? These and dozens of other remedies are not found in the medicine cabinet, but in the cozy confines of a well-stocked kitchen.

THE HEALING KITCHEN: From Tea Tin to Fruit Basket, Breadbox to Veggie Bin - How to Unlock the Curative Powers of Foods that Heal! (BenBella Books; January 2006; \$14.95) offers a banquet of information for turning everyday fruits, vegetables, spices and more into some of the most effective remedies available.

Award-winning editor and author Ellen Michaud, along with recipe expert Anita Hirsch present more than 350* ways to unlock the curative powers of foods in this down-to-earth guide to physical well-being. Backed by scientific studies, the pragmatic tips can turn any kitchen into the preventative and healing center of the home.

Cutting-edge information on more than 100* different foods is organized and presented by how foods are stored. From information on virus-fighting apricots and natural anxiety-relieving tea to stomachache-quelling honey and natural cleaning products, **THE HEALING KITCHEN** explains why and how these everyday ingredients heal the mind, body and spirit. Consumer-oriented information on buying, storing and using each food is offered, as well as 165* recipes that detail simple and delicious ways to create a healthy diet using these powerfoods.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Eating cloves is one of the best ways to ward off bacteria that causes tooth and gum decay, and ultimately heart disease
- Naturally occurring chemicals in tropical fruit help to both *stabilize* diabetes and *fight* depression



- Cooking tomatoes with a bit of olive oil increases the fruit's ability to *fight* cancer
- Bacteria found in yogurt help to *prevent* yeast infections in women
- One fruit sitting in your refrigerator can help *prevent* breast cancer
- Finnish researchers have found bread flour that will cut your risk of heart disease in *half*
- There is one meat that *won't* put your family's health at risk
- There's a fish *most* likely to soothe aching joints
- About the cookie recipe a *pediatrician* developed to fight supermarket nutri-trash

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ELLEN MICHAUD is the award-winning former editor-at-large of *Prevention Magazine*. She has been featured in *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. She is a former instructor at Temple University and hosts the annual Vermont Women's Writing Retreat. She lives in South Starksboro, Vermont.

ANITA HIRSCH, MS, RD, a Julia Child Award nominee, has worked in the food and nutrition fields for nearly 30 years – including more than 20 years spent developing and testing recipes for health books and magazines at Rodale Press, Inc. She has taught courses on food and cooking at the college level and writes a “quick and healthy” column for several newspapers. She lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

THE HEALING KITCHEN: From Tea Tin to Fruit Basket, Breadbox to Veggie Bin – How to Unlock the Curative Powers of Foods that Heal!

- Author: Ellen Michaud with Anita Hirsch, MS, RD
- ISBN: 1-932100-53-9
- Publication Month: January 2006
- Retail: \$14.95 (US)
- Publisher: BenBella Books
- Cover: Trade

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To schedule an interview with Ms. Michaud or to request additional review copies, please contact Laura Watkins, (214) 750-4656 or laura@benbellabooks.com.

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**Quantities subject to final editing*



BENBELLA BOOKS – ADVANCE REVIEW COPY – THE HEALING KITCHEN



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September 27, 2005

Contact: Laura Watkins, Director of Marketing & Publicity
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THERE IS NO FAD DIET FOR LOSING WEIGHT AND KEEPING IT OFF, ONLY A "HEALTHY OBSESSION" REALLY WORKS

*Author of Bestselling The 9 Truths About Weight Loss
Translates His Diet and Lifestyle Program into
Eight Easy Steps for Permanent Weight Loss*

THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM (BenBella Books; January 2006; \$24.95) is not for people who are a little thicker around the waist thanks to holiday festivities. This book is not about slimming down for swimsuit season or a vacation or dropping the "Freshman 15." **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM** is for those who have always battled to take off that extra 10 to 20 pounds or for those whose nagging 10 to 20 extra pounds have turned into an extra 60, 80, 100 or even 200 pounds over months or years. **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM** is a serious health and nutrition book about transforming eating and lifestyle habits into a "healthy obsession."

It is easy to follow and those who employ it will *finally* be off the diet rollercoaster and onto a better and healthier life. **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM** is about developing "normal" healthy habits – such as self-monitoring, goal-setting, problem-solving and stress management.

ABOUT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE AMERICANS

Obesity, the second leading cause of death, is a disease that affects nearly one-third of the adult American population (approximately 60 million). Today, 64.5 percent of adult Americans (about 127 million) are categorized as being overweight or obese.

According to the American Obesity Association, the tendency toward obesity is fostered by our environment: lack of physical activity combined with high-calorie, low-cost foods. And, if maintained, even weight loss as little as 10 percent of body weight can improve one's health.

THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM RESULTS

The author of **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM**, Dr. Daniel Kirschenbaum, is



the clinical director of the Healthy Living Academies Division of the Aspen Education Group, which operates camps and the nation's first therapeutic boarding school for overweight teens, Academy of the Sierras. The camps and school uniformly employ the guiding principals of **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM** methodology. In its inaugural year, the 23 students who attended Academy of the Sierras for at least one semester (approximately 28 weeks), the average total weight loss was 85 pounds, or 3.4 pounds per week.

Dateline NBC recently followed four teens over a five-month period at Academy of the Sierras and aired their inspiring success stories on August 19, 2005. As the teens celebrated graduation at Academy of the Sierras, *Dateline* commented, "Together they lost more than 300 pounds, and together they gained a new way of life." *Dateline* has followed up with the students since their graduation and learned that the four have continued to lose weight - at least 7 pounds each (as of mid-September).

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

What did they learn from **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM**? These eight, easy-to-follow steps:

- **Make the decision** — pledge to lose weight and keep it off
- **Know the enemy** — understand that your body *wants* you to gain weight
- **Eat to lose** — know what benefits and what harms your body
- **Find lovable foods that love you back** — find foods that you truly enjoy that will also help you lose and keep off weight
- **Move to lose** — an active lifestyle is essential; take at least 10,000 steps a day
- **Self-monitor and plan very consistently** — document your intake regularly and plan for everyday life and high-risk situations
- **Understand and manage stress** — control it with and without food
- **Make HOP last a lifetime** — prepare for slumps and combat them with improved coping skills and effective slump-busters

Dr. Daniel Kirschenbaum translates his proven diet and lifestyle program into an approach that will help followers develop a "healthy obsession," an attitude and way of life essential to permanent weight loss. After all, looking great is only one of the benefits; this approach will also help to create permanent healthy routines for a longer and better quality of life.

THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM also includes dozens of healthy, tasty and guilt-free recipes developed by the chefs of the most successful weight-loss programs ever developed for teenagers, Wellspring Camps and the Academy of the Sierras. These recipes



are easy to follow and take just minutes to prepare. HOP also includes dozens of useful weight-loss tools, such as lists of fat facts, exercise benefits and informative quizzes to become a masterful weight controller for life.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

The Healthy Obsession Program: An Eight Step Guide to Safe and Permanent Weight Loss (Smart Weight Loss Instead of Low-carb Lunacy)

- Author: Daniel Kirschenbaum, PhD
- ISBN: 1-932100-71-7
- Publication Month: January 2006
- Retail: \$24.95 (US)
- Publisher: BenBella Books
- Cover: Hardcover

ABOUT DR. KIRSCHENBAUM

DANIEL S. KIRSCHENBAUM, PH.D., is the clinical director of the Healthy Living Academies Division of Aspen Education Group. He is also director of the Center for Behavioral Medicine & Sport Psychology in Chicago and professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University Medical School. He has served as a consultant to dozens of professional journals, the U.S. Olympic Committee, the National Basketball Association, the Ladies Professional Golf Association, the World Scientific Congress on Golf, the Chicago Bears and several major corporations.

Dr. Kirschenbaum is a fellow and former president of the Division of Exercise and Sport Psychology and the American Psychological Association. He is an award-winning researcher, having received numerous federal and other grants for research and having published more than 120 articles in scientific journals and books. Dr. Kirschenbaum's last book, *The 9 Truths About Weight Loss*, was unanimously endorsed as "the best book ever written for the public on how to lose weight and keep it off" by the Board of Directors of the American Council on Exercise. He lives just north of Chicago with his wife, Sue Payne, a poet and Northwestern University clinical assistant professor of law, and his three children, Alex, Max and Rosie.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To schedule an interview with Dr. Kirschenbaum or to request additional review copies, please contact Laura Watkins, (214) 750-4656 or laura@benbellabooks.com.

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PRAISE FOR ELLEN MICHAUD AND THE HEALING KITCHEN

"**THE HEALING KITCHEN** is the perfect cure for dinner dread. Its delicious and doable recipes are sure to please even picky family members and improve their health."

-- Karen Cicero, Food and nutrition director, CHILD Magazine

"There should be a copy of **THE HEALING KITCHEN** in every kitchen in America!"

-- Catherine Cassidy, editor-in-chief of *A Taste of Home*, and former executive editor of *Prevention Magazine*

"As a regular contributor to *diane*, *The Curves Magazine*, Ellen has changed lives with her powerful, moving stories. In her new book, **THE HEALING KITCHEN**, she continues to change lives by offering many practical, simple methods for improving your health and your life. This well-researched book is jam packed with common sense advice, utilizing everyday household items and ingredients most of us already have on our shelves."

-- Diane Heavin, co-founder, Curves International and publisher of *diane*, *The Curves Magazine*

"In this day and age of 'good' and 'bad' foods, phytochemicals, trans-fats, anti-oxidants and other such ambiguous nutrition concepts, we now have a fascinating book defining what and how to eat on a daily basis.

"**THE HEALING KITCHEN** does a wonderful job of not only highlighting the foods that belong in a healthy kitchen, but also explaining why the foods are healing. A rich blend of science, research and practical information ... to say nothing of positive recipes. Cookies with a purpose, anyone?"

-- Nancy Clark, MS, RD, Sports Nutrition Services, Boston
Author of *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook*

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PRAISE FOR DR. KIRSCHENBAUM AND THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM

"In a world filled with bogus, fad diets it is nice to see an experienced psychologist using his research and clinical background to offer the general public sound advice."

-- Jennifer Bremer MD, Director of the Eating Disorders Psychopharmacology Clinic, University of Chicago

"**THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM** is packed with scientifically sound, balanced, practical and reader-friendly information and guidance – a truly winning combination. His no-nonsense approach is invaluable for anyone who is serious about losing weight and maintaining the loss for a lifetime. Congratulations Dr. Kirschenbaum, for having the courage to tell it as it is! His concept of a 'healthy obsession,' which includes persistence, vigilance, consistency, passion and focus, are key factors for lifetime success.

-- Judy E. Marshel, PhD, RD, CDN, former senior nutritionist at Weight Watchers International

"A terrific book filled with practical steps to a healthier lifestyle. Forget about those crazy diets; follow these 8 steps and you will achieve long-term success."

-- John Foreyt, PhD, Director, Behavioral Medicine Research Center Baylor College of Medicine Houston, TX

"As a dietitian and weight loss counselor for 27 years, I have seen that individuals require individual approaches for successful weight loss, while consuming healthy low-fat, high-fiber, high quality foods (including carbs!) and moving more daily. The success stories in this book prove that Dr. Kirschenbaum has a formula for weight loss that really works! The comprehensive cognitive-behavioral approach he uses, incorporating healthy eating and exercise has helped countless individuals to lose weight and turn their lives around."

-- Georgia Kostas, MPH, RD, LD, Nutrition Consultant
Author, *The Cooper Clinic Solution to the Diet Revolution*

"At last, a scientifically grounded, practical guide to safe and long term weight loss - one that might help put a stop to the insanity surrounding low-carb fad diets.



Dr. Kirschenbaum has been a distinguished researcher and consultant for 30 years in the field of weight management and he has helped thousands of people lose weight safely.”

-- Rob Smith, PhD, Psychologist, Waltham, MA

“As Dr. Kirschenbaum continues to be a wise guiding light in helping all scientists understand the complex medical, behavioral, and emotional challenges of obesity treatment, his books for the public are profound, pragmatic and personable. I can find no better compendium of facts and clear practical advice for overweight people than this one. The value to all who read **THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM** will be self-evident from the very first chapter and I have no doubt that the book will be used as a reference in obesity treatment for decades to come. No wonder countless obesity experts entrust their patients to Dr. Kirschenbaum.”

-- John Rabkin, MD, Co-Director, Pacific Laparoscopy (San Francisco)
Former Associate Professor of Surgery, Oregon Health and Sciences University
Fellow, American College of Surgery

“Dr. Kirschenbaum understands that dieters are looking for. He not only explains how to eat and exercise, but he tackles the question that other books never touch: ‘How do we motivate ourselves to do what we need to do?’ With his research-based techniques and touching case examples, readers can find the inspiration and skills they need to succeed at losing weight and keeping it off.”

-- Eileen Rosendahl, PhD, Coordinator of Outreach and Education, Center for Weight Management, North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System; Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Albert Einstein College of Medicine

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS THE HEALTHY OBSESSION PROGRAM

Daniel S. Kirschenbaum, PhD

Question #1: *What makes HOP distinctive from other approaches that advocate healthy eating and exercising as methods to lose weight?*

Answer #1: HOP is a scientifically based approach that certainly does emphasize increased activity and healthier eating. However, almost all previous programs that have followed this “sensible” style have taken the easy way out and focused on *moderation* as the key. HOP focuses on what really works: a healthy obsession, a more extreme approach. HOP encourages serious weight controllers to find foods that they love that love them back (i.e., very low fat foods), to find ways of moving around more than they do now (without training for a marathon) and to do this with more comfort, satisfaction, and success than they could have imagined. HOP encourages a tremendous consistency in focus and provides very specific directions for how to attain that goal, with a lot less difficulty than most people think.

The eight steps of HOP are:

- Step 1:** Make the decision
- Step 2:** Know the enemy: your biology
- Step 3:** Seven elements of eating to lose (very low fat, controlled sugar, frequent protein, low energy density, high fiber, minimal liquid calories, and calorie consciousness)
- Step 4:** Find lovable foods that love you back
- Step 5:** Move to lose (10,000 steps per day - minimum)
- Step 6:** Self-monitor and plan very consistently
- Step 7:** Understand and manage stress—with *and* without food
- Step 8:** Make HOP last a lifetime: slumps & slump busters

Question #2: *By suggesting that people must develop a healthy obsession to lose weight, aren't you substituting one problem, an obsession, for another (compulsive eating)?*

Answer #2: Every athlete develops a healthy obsession, even successful athletes at the high school level and certainly beyond that. They must focus consistently on their sport,



learn what is necessary to succeed, carefully monitor and observe their performances and factors that affect their performances, and obtain additional help when needed to handle the stresses and strains of sport performance. These athletes also must learn how to transform their bodies in ways that those bodies resist mightily.

The same exact approach applies to successful weight control. The body resists successful weight control very consistently and aggressively; but, biology is not destiny. Weight controllers can learn how to modify these biological resistances in a comfortable and very satisfying way. Research on this approach clearly shows that it is something that can really work. A healthy obsession doesn't have to become something oppressive and unpleasant.

Question #3: Many dieters seem to use low carb diets effectively, even though there is some controversy about the safety and the effectiveness of the approach. Why do you object so strenuously to low carb dieting? Isn't it good for some people, some of the time?

Answer #3: The following ten reasons discussed in HOP explaining why low carb diets don't make sense and don't work in the long run:

1. Although Americans did gain weight in the past few decades, we *didn't* eat less fat during this time.
2. Low-carb diets do lead to short term weight losses sometimes, but they may prove quite dangerous over time.
3. High-carb diets boost insulin levels, but so do low-carb (high protein and high fat) diets.
4. When low carb diets OR low fat diets produce weight loss, both diets cause ketosis.
5. Certain carbs are NOT particularly bad just because they have high Glycemic Indexes; the good carb/bad carb notion vastly oversimplifies the truth.
6. Eating fat will make you fat: A calorie is not a calorie is not a calorie.
7. Eating fewer carbs will not necessarily help you lose weight.
8. Low-carb diets do NOT work better than very low-fat diets, especially in the long-run.
9. Even ostensibly healthier versions of low-carb diets like *The South Beach Diet* are misleading, inaccurate, and may do more harm than good.
10. Biological mechanisms favor low-fat diets for weight loss.

Question #4: If low carb dieting is so worthless, as described in your book under the subtitle, "low carb lunacy", why have so many millions of people at least tried it and many millions seem to continue to use some version of it?

Answer #4: In HOP, I explain four factors that account for the somewhat mysterious acceptance of low carb dieting in our culture. This acceptance is mysterious because it flies in the face of scientific evidence. However, as described within these four factors, people do many things that scientific evidence would advise against. Part of the problem



is that even very intelligent lay people have difficulty gaining access to the scientific truth about such things as weight control. The companies with billions invested interests find ways to promote their products far more readily than those who understand and can explain the scientific alternatives.

The five factors that account for this unfortunate acceptance of low carb dieting are:

- Losing the Forest Because of the Trees
- Capitalism Trumps Science
- Spurious Correlations
- The Dosage Problem: *Very Low-Fat Diets Work Better Than Low-Fat or Moderate Fat Diets*

Question #5: *What do you mean by the statement, “Find lovable foods that love you back?”*

Answer #5: Many successful weight controllers remain food oriented individuals. They are people who enjoy food, often both the preparation as well as the consumption of it. There is absolutely no reason to give that up when pursuing successful weight control. There are literally millions of foods that produce a great deal of satisfaction and yet are still constructive, rather than destructive.

Examples of the foods preferred by thousands of my clients over the past 30 years include: low-fat pizza made with fat free mozzarella cheese; fat free yogurts; sweet potatoes prepared in dozens of ways; fat free French fries with ketchup; low-fat hot dogs with fat free beans; fat free garlic bread; pasta with rich and spicy tomato sauces; fat free Asian stir fries; grilled shrimp in cocktail sauce; fat free cheesecake; fat free cream cheese on bagels. Even a quick perusal of the internet reveals literally thousands of recipes for fat free and nearly fat free foods. Eating in any type of restaurant can be managed within this program with just a little bit of trial and error and knowledge.

Encouraging people to change their lifestyles in a way that produces deprivation and unhappiness simply doesn't work. The approach suggested here has proven very satisfying to many thousands of successful weight controllers.

Question #6: *You seem to emphasize planning and self-monitoring tremendously. Why do you do that?*

Answer #6: The research evidence shows that the following rather remarkable statement is true:

*If you could maintain a written record of everything you eat and all of your exercising for the next ten years, or at least 75 percent of your eating and exercising behaviors, you would **almost certainly** become an effective weight controller.*

The research evidence includes the following findings:

- Among weight controllers in a 12-week program, those who self-monitored consistently lost 64 percent more weight than the inconsistent self-monitors; the consistent self-monitors also maintained this superior weight loss three months later.



- Weight controllers who discontinued self-monitoring during a three-week winter holiday season gained 57 times as much weight as their counterparts who continued to self-monitor consistently.
- Only highly consistent self-monitors lost any weight during a holiday season in two different studies.
- Weight controllers who self-monitored very consistently the first few weeks of several professional treatment programs maintained much greater weight losses, compared to inconsistent self-monitors when evaluated one to two years after treatment began. Consistent self-monitoring improves commitment to change, increases feelings of control, improves understanding of eating and exercising patterns, and promotes more positive moods.

Question #7: What are some of the causes of slumps that you mention in your book and some suggested slump-busters?

Answer #7: Causes of slumps include the following nine challenges:

- Lapses
- Injuries and illnesses
- Scale phobia
- Vacations
- Changes in key relationships
- Work or financial crises
- Major changes in eating environments
- Poor problem solving
- Abstinence violation effect

The following are suggested slump-busters:

- Re-visit your HOP
- Health clubs
- Personal trainers
- Equipment
- Radical changes in diet
- Medications
- Self-help programs and books
- Professional help



PUBLICATION DETAILS

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ABOUT DR. KIRSCHENBAUM

DANIEL S. KIRSCHENBAUM, PH.D., is the clinical director of the Healthy Living Academies Division of Aspen Education Group. He is also director of the Center for Behavioral Medicine & Sport Psychology in Chicago and professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University Medical School. He has served as a consultant to dozens of professional journals, the U.S. Olympic Committee, the National Basketball Association, the Ladies Professional Golf Association, the World Scientific Congress on Golf, the Chicago Bears and several major corporations.

Dr. Kirschenbaum is a fellow and former president of the Division of Exercise and Sport Psychology and the American Psychological Association. He is an award-winning researcher, having received numerous federal and other grants for research and having published more than 120 articles in scientific journals and books. Dr. Kirschenbaum's last book, *The 9 Truths About Weight Loss*, was unanimously endorsed as "the best book ever written for the public on how to lose weight and keep it off" by the Board of Directors of the American Council on Exercise. He lives just north of Chicago with his wife, Sue Payne, a poet and Northwestern University clinical assistant professor of law, and his three children, Alex, Max and Rosie.

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EDUCATION WEEK

Published: January 19, 2005

Weighing Choices

A new private school aims to help overweight boys and girls make better decisions about how much to eat and how often to exercise.

By Rhea R. Borja
Reedley, Calif.

On a foggy December night, silence envelops this tiny agricultural town nestled at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains. But turn onto a narrow two-lane paved road, and soon noise punctuates the air.

In a corner of a 68-acre school campus here, the thwack of hockey sticks hitting blacktop and shouts of teenagers echo across acres of peach orchards. Halogen lights flood a basketball court where a half-dozen middle and high school students dodge and weave during the street hockey game, their faces rosy-cheeked from exertion.

It seems like a typical after-school game. But such physical activity was unthinkable for these students a few short months ago.

In September, some couldn't walk from their dormitory to the main school building without getting winded. A leisurely two-mile bike ride left them exhausted.

But in this hour-long game, many dart up and down the court in short bursts of speed.

The students attend the private Academy of the Sierras, billed as the nation's first weight-loss school for obese teenagers. Students must be at least 30 pounds overweight for two years to attend the yearlong boarding school, which offers mandatory exercise, behavioral therapy, college-prep classes, and a healthy food regimen.

The aim: shedding and keeping off excess pounds through improving all dimensions of a student—academic, emotional, and physical, school administrators say. The school has 32 students, many of them girls, and may enroll up to 70 8th to 12th graders by the end of the school year.

“We’re teaching a lifestyle, a healthy obsession,” says Daniel S. Kirschenbaum, the director of Healthy Living Academies, a division of the for-profit Aspen Education Group, which owns the Academy of the Sierras. The company, based in Cerritos, Calif., operates 30 therapeutic boarding schools, as well as weight-loss camps and outdoor education programs in 11 states.

That means that while academy staff members guide the students, the responsibil-



Each student receives a fitness test during orientation week. The test includes taking “before” body measurements, as personal trainer John Peterson does with student Mal Mahedy, 16.



A game of volleyball ends the second day of orientation for staff and students at the newly opened Academy of the Sierras, which is billing itself as the first residential boarding school for overweight teens in the nation. Center is Terry Henry, 16.



Students and staff enjoy the fire and roast marshmallows for S'Mores after an evening walk into the woods. The group later told ghost stories around the fire. Left to right are program founder Ryan Craig, students Jarrett Fitzpatrick and Terry Henry.

ity to change bad habits rests on the students' shoulders. So the students constantly monitor themselves: They write down the number of calories and fat grams they eat at each meal. They wear pedometers (as does the staff) to ensure they walk at least 10,000 steps daily. And they keep journals noting their emotional, physical, and academic progress.

"Self-monitoring is key to successful weight loss," says Molly Carmel, who as clinical director is in charge of the school's behavior therapy program. "Everyone is empowered."

Unlike other popular weight-loss programs, the academy doesn't stint on food. Students can have their fill of a colorful salad and fruit bar, which features "uncontrolled foods" that are low in calories and fat. "Controlled foods"—such as baked ham, rice, and potato pancakes—are carefully measured by cafeteria employees. Students can come back for seconds, but must note the amounts in their food journals.

Mal Mahedy, a veteran of weight-loss camps at age 16, says she's learning a new way to eat. "There are a lot of different selections here," she says. "Not like at weight-loss camp, where all I ate were veggie burgers."

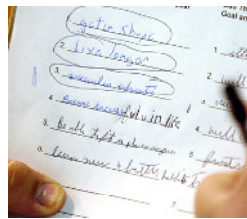
Cooking healthy, low-fat meals is also one of the practical skills the students learn. They prepared most of the dishes for both the school's Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas banquet.

"Before I came here," Mal says as she chops onions in culinary class, "I didn't even know how to crack an egg." That is one of many differences students experience when they come here.

Another is that the ubiquitous noise of modern technologies is muted. GameBoys, televisions, and computers are barred from dorm rooms. Internet use is limited to academic research in a computer lab under adult supervision, and students are allowed to call home just twice a week. The lone TV set resides in the workout room, in front of shiny new exercise machines.

"If you really want to see 'The O.C.," says program director Dan Barney, referring to the popular teenage drama, "you have to do it while on a treadmill."

In fact, the students exercise throughout the day, starting with



During orientation week, a student fills out a questionnaire that asks the teenagers about their goals for the program.



Crystal Arispe, 20, left, Krystal Cvitanovich, 18, center, and Terry Henry, 16, relax in the Academy's main lobby, a gathering place for students during the morning break.

Three Months Later, 50 Pounds Lighter

When 12-year-old Jarrett Fitzpatrick first came to the Academy of the Sierras, he carried more than 200 pounds on his 5-foot-5 frame.

The sandy-haired 8th grader from suburban Chicago was a pro at air hockey, but fumbled in more active pursuits such as volleyball and softball. His excess weight prematurely wore down his shoes, and he regularly got blisters on his feet.

At his old middle school, thinner classmates taunted him, his grades plummeted, and he had very low self-esteem, his father says. And Jarrett, who has three older, thinner siblings, continued to gain weight. "Once you're a little overweight, someone makes fun of you, and you start overeating to make yourself feel better," says his father, Brian Fitzpatrick, a small-business owner and retired commodities broker.

So Jarrett came to the academy, which was founded to meet the needs of students who are overweight. He was unsure about the school at first, he admits, and sometimes got overwhelmed with its expectations.

But in his first three months at the academy, Jarrett lost 50 pounds. His grades have improved, and he seems to have calmed down and matured, his father says.

a two- to three-mile walk at 7 a.m. and ending at 10 p.m. with a vigorous game of hockey or basketball. They have weekly sessions with a personal trainer, and sometimes the students go on active overnight trips, such as camping and hiking in nearby Kings Canyon National Park.

Many of the students here lacked the study skills, discipline, and motivation to get good grades at their former schools. So each of them gets a personal academic plan and attends mandatory study hall every night after dinner. Academic director Krista Chikwava also works with the students' home schools to ensure students take the classes they need so they will be on track when they return to those schools.

Classes here are harder than at his old school in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., says Kevin Marema, 12. "The deadlines for assignments are longer, and the teachers aren't constantly reminding us," he says. "So it puts more responsibility on the student."

Therapy is also a major component of the academy. Many of the students, who were often teased at their old schools, battle behavioral or mental-health problems. So they attend two group-therapy sessions and two individual sessions a week.

The sessions help students understand the emotional issues underlying their weight gain. And they learn how to better cope in a world that tempts people with a double cheeseburger and fries in one commercial, only to taunt them with images of stick-thin models in another.

"[Therapy] is the heart of the change process," says Kirschenbaum.

The Academy of the Sierras is a venture into the unknown for the Aspen Education Group. No blueprint existed for such a school, says David Burns, the academy's director of operations.

Many of the students, who were often teased at their old schools, battle behavioral or mental-health problems.

The company has sunk at least \$5 million into buying and renovating the school and its capacious grounds, which border the Kings River. The school, once a convalescent hospital run by Mennonites, likely won't see a profit for at least a couple of years, Burns says.

It opened as childhood-obesity rates are a rising concern. The percentage of overweight 6- to 19-year-olds nationwide has tripled since 1980, to 16 percent, according to the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Consequently, obesity-related illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and sleep apnea have increased sharply in children and adolescents.

"We have really fumbled the ball," says Paul M. Ribisl, a professor of health and exercise science at Wake

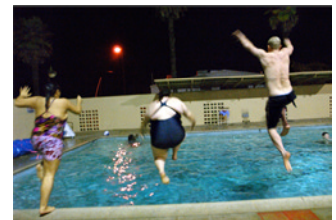
Three Months Later, 50 Pounds Lighter (continued)

When he was home for Christmas, Jarrett continued to count his calories religiously. When he went to the movies, he asked whether the popcorn was air-popped or cooked in oil, says his father, amused.

Some of Jarrett's healthy habits have also rubbed off on his father, 48, who now wears a pedometer to track his daily steps, and tries to eat more healthfully.

"I really questioned whether a healthy diet and exercise would work," says Mr. Fitzpatrick. "And it's working wonderfully."

—Rhea R. Borja



Pool activities are popular at Academy of the Sierras. A night swim session in the heated campus pool draws many students, as well as residential adviser Tyler Cornell, right. Students have scheduled physical activities until 10 p.m. on most nights.

Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. “In this society, exercise is gone and food is everywhere.”

What’s most alarming, he adds, is that while the increasing rates of obesity in adults have been gradual, the rise in childhood obesity has been more dramatic.

So the Academy of the Sierras is an idea whose time has come, Ribisl says. He applauds how the school is trying to change unhealthy behaviors gradually and in a supportive setting.

“A school that teaches them about their bodies and shows that everyone can manage their own weight is good,” he says.

At 16, Terry Henry sports multiple body piercings, messy hair, and an impish grin. He favors black T-shirts with statements such as “Chaos. Pain. Disorder. I see my work here is done,” and displays an often-bawdy sense of humor.

In September, the 5-foot-11 student from Exeter, N.H., weighed 511 pounds, couldn’t walk a block without wheezing, and couldn’t get off a couch without help. By December, he was 116 pounds lighter and had dropped 11 clothing sizes.

He says he’s more energetic and routinely logs more than 20,000 steps a day. And Terry, who once slammed his fist into a brick wall in frustration, feels less angry and more self-confident. He looks forward to going home to his family and friends.

“I get to show them my new self,” he says with a shy smile.

Other students have similar tales. In September, many were at times sullen and sluggish. All were homesick. By mid-December, they look markedly thinner and seem more confident.

Kevin, who has lost 40 pounds so far, and now weighs about 200 pounds, says both of his parents have had gastric-bypass surgery, which reduces a stomach to the size of a golf ball. He didn’t want that in his future. So he chose to go to the academy. “This was almost my last resort,” Kevin says.

Being teenagers, the students still lapse into bouts of uncertainty and moodiness. And sometimes the tension between students is palpable. Tempers flare.

“There’s a lot of drama here right now,” says Tiara Jones, 16, one morning before final exams as a classmate yells in exasperation to another, who screams back.

Yet for the most part, the students are supportive of one another, and even comfortable enough to poke fun at themselves.

One morning in the computer lab, 12-year old Jarrett Fitzpatrick Googles “fat animals.” Images of portly cats pop up on his computer screen. Scrolling over a photo of a rotund prairie dog, he stage whispers, “That’s the AOS mascot.”



Program founder Ryan Craig and student Mal Mahedy walk together after Craig loaned Mahedy his socks to help relieve a blister she developed. Students begin each day at 7 a.m. with a mandatory physical activity such as the popular two-mile lap around farming fields surrounding the school.



Academy executive director Ryan Craig serves Tiara Jones, 16, left, a weighed portion of pasta during a holiday dinner the week before Christmas break. The school considers higher-calorie cafeteria choices “controlled foods” and monitors them, while others, such as most salad bar items, are available in unlimited quantities. The students, who modified existing recipes to make them healthier, cooked the entire meal.

Another night, a handful of students swim in the school's heated outdoor pool despite the chilly temperature. Steam rises from the water as 16-year-old Theresa Cocuzza gets ready to dive in.

"Watch it!" she yells to the students already in the pool. "Fat person coming through!"

They laugh good-naturedly, but Jarrett admonishes her. "We're all fat," he says. "You can't say that."

"Yes I can. I'm not skinny," Theresa says indignantly.

"You are," he insists. "Your suit is falling off of you."

She doesn't reply, but looks pleased. Indeed, while her pink one-piece swimsuit is not, in fact, falling off, it is several sizes too big. Over the past few months, she's lost more than 40 pounds.

But experts say that losing weight is only half the battle. Keeping the weight off is the real test. Judith S. Stern, the co-founder and vice president of the Washington-based American Obesity Association, is one expert who is taking a wait-and-see approach before drawing conclusions about the academy.

"I have no doubt they'll lose weight when they're in the program," she says of the students. "But what about when they go back home?"

That's something the academy prepares for, says Carmel, the clinical director. The students go to local restaurants each month, for example, to get used to ordering nutritious meals. They've gone on a scavenger hunt at a local supermarket to find low-fat food. Teachers and members of the residential staff also talk to parents weekly about their children's progress and how they can help them once they return.

In September, many were at times sullen and sluggish. All were homesick. By mid-December, they look markedly thinner and seem more confident.

And once the students leave the school, they'll participate in a six-month online "after care" program. The Web site will include a journal so they can keep monitoring their diet and exercise, a message board so they can chat with other students, and a venue to communicate with an academy therapist.

"We start discharge planning from day one," says Carmel.

Thanksgiving was the first time the students were home. Almost all kept monitoring what they ate. Only two gained weight, which was less than a pound.

But many of the students did not keep exercising, says Ryan Craig, the academy's



Krystal Cvitanovich answers a question during a classroom orientation session led by academic director Krista Chikwava during students' first week on campus. The school, which currently has 32 students, is steadily expanding its enrollment but plans to keep class sizes below 15 students per class.



The original "group of seven," the first set of students at Academy of the Sierras, has their last combined cognitive behavioral therapy session in the fall before the arrival of two new students signals the necessity of breaking up into smaller group meetings. Left to right, Jarrett Fitzpatrick, 12, Terry Henry, 16, Mal Mahedy, 16 and Theresa Cocuzza, 16.



Jarrett Fitzpatrick relaxes in the Kings River, the destination of an off-campus Saturday bike ride from Academy of the Sierras in September. To the right is recreational therapist Melissa Freeman.

executive director. So when the students went home for Christmas, they were given personalized instructions on how to keep physically active.

Another criticism of the school is its price tag. At \$5,500 a month, or \$44,000 per school year, the academy is out of reach for most families. The poor and some minority groups have higher obesity rates than the national average, notes Alicia Moag-Stahlberg, the executive director for Action For Healthy Kids, a Skokie, Ill.-based nonprofit organization that aims to improve nutrition and physical activity in public schools.

“For a lot of kids, this school isn’t going to be an affordable option,” she says.

The academy’s monthly cost is in the upper range for therapeutic boarding schools, which cost \$3,700 to \$5,500 a month, according to the Prescott, Ariz.-based National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs.

Craig points out that medical insurance often covers a portion of the school fees. He adds that the school offers a student loan program, and may promote scholarships for students in the future.

On one of the last school nights in December, multicolored lights swirl in a darkened room, Usher’s “Yeah!” pounds on the stereo system, and students wave neon-green glow-sticks in time with the hip-hop beat. A machine blows bubbles above the students’ bobbing heads.

It’s the academy’s first holiday dance, and all of the students are throwing their best moves on the dance floor. In a few days, they go home for Christmas, and the students’ exuberance is infectious.

They sing along. They jump up and down. Terry plays air guitar and hops on both feet. He gets carried away, and falls on the confetti-littered floor. But he doesn’t retreat to the sidelines in embarrassment.

Instead, he laughs, gets up, and brushes himself off. He starts dancing again.



In her dorm room, Jessi Fay, 17, gets help with her hair from residential adviser Elsa Garza in preparation for the holiday formal at the school that evening. Students hired a disc jockey and decorated for the event, which they dubbed “Winter Jam.” The event was held to celebrate the end of the semester.



Strobe lights flash in the main room of the girls’ dorm during “Winter Jam” while students dance. Left is Krystal Cvitanovich.

Portraits



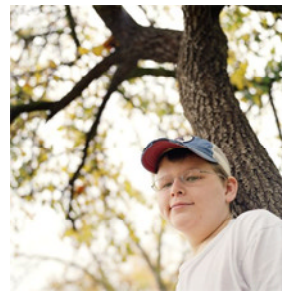
Krystal Cvitanovich, 18
San Pedro, CA
September, 2004



Krystal Cvitanovich, 18
San Pedro, CA
December, 2004
weight lost: 43 pounds



Jarrett Fitzpatrick, 12
St. Charles, IL
September 2004



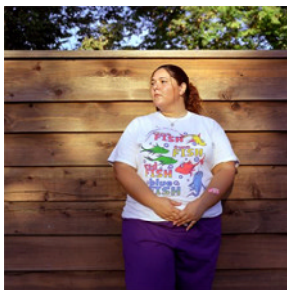
Jarrett Fitzpatrick, 12
St. Charles, IL
December 2004
weight lost: 49 pounds



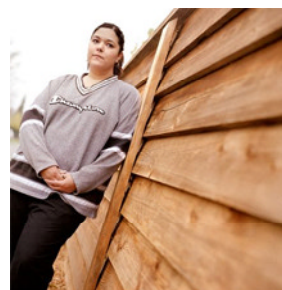
Jamie Schleifer, 15
Edison, NJ
September 2004



Jamie Schleifer, 15
Edison, NJ
December 2004
weight lost: 33 pounds



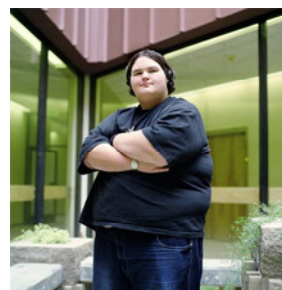
Crystal Arispe, 20
Sacramento, CA
September 2004



Crystal Arispe, 20
Sacramento, CA
December 2004
weight lost: 57 pounds



Terry Henry, 16
Exeter, NH
September 2004



Terry Henry, 16
Exeter, NH
December 2004
weight lost: 116 pounds

The New York Times

ON THE WEB

June 28, 2005

For Overweight Children, Are 'Fat Camps' a Solution?

By ABBY ELLIN

Two summers ago, Alexis Werth Mason was 12 years old and weighed 133 pounds. Not huge, but at 4-foot-11, she was heavier than she wanted to be.

Shopping was painful. Classmates teased her. A neighbor told her that she was too big to pull on his sled. After desperately trying - and failing - at diets, her mother, Bonnie Werth, asked if she wanted to go to a weight-loss camp.

"She said, 'I can't go to a fat camp, Mommy, all the kids will make fun of me,' " Ms. Werth, the president of Team Services, a marketing firm in Woodbury, N.Y., recalled. "But I convinced her to go."

"It wasn't so much the weight loss," Ms. Werth said, "but I wanted her to be around other kids with the same problems. She felt very isolated and alone in her issues."

Alexis, who is known as Lexi, spent eight weeks at Camp Shane, in Ferndale, N.Y., and lost 25 pounds. She has kept off every ounce since.

This is a big deal.

It is easy, after all, to lose weight in a controlled environment, but it is a different story when you are back home and faced with temptations like pizza and ice cream and get little to no exercise. So it's not surprising that many children who attend weight-loss camps regain the weight.

"Coming home from camp was hard," Lexi, now 14, said. "I knew what I had to do, but I saw everyone eating at school. When you see all your friends pigging out and watching old movies and crying and stuff, you want to join in. It's peer pressure. So I ate in moderation."

Thousands of young people will be spending this summer at weight-loss camps, a popular option for parents who have no idea how to inspire their children to shed pounds. It is a slowly growing industry. Nationwide, there are about a dozen camps devoted strictly to weight loss, four of them opened in the last year. But whether they work remains unclear.

Statistics about weight-loss camps are hard to come by. Campers often do not keep in touch with camp directors, nor do they always respond honestly to questionnaires.

But of the 1,000 campers who will weave their way this summer in and out of Tony Sparber's three New Image camps in Florida, California and the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, more than half are repeat customers. The figure is about the same for the 800 campers heading to Camp Shane in the Catskills.

"Maybe they're not losing the weight specifically, but instead they're learning something that they can use 20 years down the road and put into use when they're ready," said Marla Coleman, a former president of the American Camping Association.

Ms. Coleman added: "It's education. Knowledge. It goes to everything camp does, which is experiential learning."

Perhaps more important, Ms. Coleman said, camp gives children a reprieve from weight gain and the torment they often experience back in the real world. Many play sports for the first time, and have social lives.

But that is not always the case. Danielle Rothman, now 17, spent three summers at Camp Shane. "Everyone at Shane was overweight, yet people were still being made fun of about their weight," said Ms. Rothman, who lives in Dix Hills, N.Y.. "The more overweight kids are still made fun of. I was one of the thinner kids, and people would say, 'Why are you here?' It made me feel good, but after a while I wanted to hit them."

Weight-loss camps usually run for three weeks, six weeks or eight week sessions, and they cost about \$7,500 for the entire summer - about \$1,500 more than nonspecialized camps. Campers get about 1,500 calories a day, and campers generally spend three to four hours a day doing some kind of physical activity, as well other activities like drama or arts and crafts. There are weekly weigh-ins and regular classes in nutrition and cooking.

Most camps offer sessions for campers to explore their feelings about food and weight. But critics worry that the camps are not run by people who have the necessary credentials to handle children with serious emotional baggage, and that the sessions are too short to change a lifetime of bad habits.

Teresa Guerrero worked at a camp in Southern California in 2003 and 2004, where she was a guidance counselor.

"There were a lot of very messed-up kids," said Ms. Guerrero, 26, who is a doctoral candidate in clinical and school psychology at Hofstra. "The majority of them were compulsive overeaters."

"A lot were medicated, or ate out of boredom, or cut themselves," she said. "A lot had experienced divorce or the death of a parent. They could trace the weight gain back to that. It was a big responsibility for the counselors, none of whom was really equipped to deal with it."

One of the more promising programs is offered by the two-year-old Wellspring Camps, which operates Camp Wellspring, near Lake Placid, N.Y., for young women ages 14 to 22; Wellspring Adventure Camp near Asheville, N.C., for boys and girls 11 to 16; and Western Wellspring Adventure Camp in California, for boys and girls 13 to 18.

Unlike traditional weight-loss camps, Wellspring uses a cognitive behavioral approach. Campers set goals and monitor themselves, techniques that are components of behavior modification, one of the most widely accepted approaches to long-term weight-loss success.

Each camper is responsible for her own eating and exercise habits. At meals, for example, campers get "controlled" foods, like measured entrees and dessert, and "uncontrolled" foods: berries, melons or fat-free soups. They can eat as much of the uncontrolled foods as they want, but they have to jot down the calories and fat grams in a journal, with the goal of staying under 20 grams of fat and about 1,200 calories a day.

They use pedometers and are told to aim for a minimum of 10,000 steps a day. The overall goal is to change eating habits and make new ones.

"Self-control is a process in behavioral terms - keeping track of target behaviors and systematically evaluating these behaviors and goal setting," said Dr. Daniel Kirschenbaum, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern who helped design the program, but has no financial involvement in the camps.

Dr. Kirschenbaum said self-control could be taught like any other skill through instruction, modeling and encouragement.

So far, the camps have had encouraging success. A recent study by Wellspring found that 91 percent of all its campers had maintained the weight or continued to lose six months after camp ended; the weight loss afterward averaged 7.4 pounds. The camps plan to continue tracking campers' long-term weight loss to try to persuade health insurers to cover the programs.

Still, those involved agree that the most significant factor for success is the level of parental involvement once camp ends. It is not enough for the child to return home from 30 pounds lighter if the household does not change as well - whether that means eliminating junk foods or encouraging exercise.

"The people who are successful are the parents who go the extra mile and are observant and watch their kids," said Tony Sparber, 48, who has been in the industry for 25 years.

Although all camps offer lectures for parents on visiting day, only a few show up, organizers say.

After camp ends, a New Image nutritionist calls families each month. Every two months they receive a newsletter with recipes. But Mr. Sparber acknowledges that most people do not follow through. "It starts out strong, and as time goes on it fades," he said. This year, in an effort to reach more people, he is adding an online counseling program with a nutritionist, as well as a weight management and fitness program at the Jewish Community Center in Tenafly, N.J.

Only about one-third of the campers at Camp Wellspring and Wellspring Adventure Camp adhered to its after-care program, which includes keeping a daily online journal for self-monitoring and setting goals, and chatting with a behavioral coach by phone or e-mail.

All of those who followed that regimen, sustained or continued their weight loss at the three-month mark, said Ryan Craig, president of Wellspring camps, who is also director of the Academy of the Sierras, a boarding school for obese adolescents in Reedley, Calif.

Lexi Werth Mason attributes her weight-loss success to two things: her goal of fitting into a two-piece bathing suit, and her mother. When she first returned home from camp, her mother had snack bags full of pre-cut vegetables waiting for her. Every night they discuss what Lexi can eat. The two shop together, read labels, prepare menus and cook.

"People don't have time to sit down to home-cooked meals, and they're so busy they get Big Macs," said Lexi. "At camp I learned that there's 590 calories in one, so we don't do that anymore. Now we cook dinners because I'm conscious of what I'm eating. We substitute light or fat-free for sour cream. Even if you do have a cookie every once in a while, it's not that big of a deal. You work it off."

Lexi's mother said, "My fear was that when she lost all this weight that she would get so obsessive about it that it would develop into an eating disorder."

Ms. Werth continued: "From the day she came home, I said, 'It's not about leaving all this stuff behind.' The minute you deprive yourself of everything you've loved and enjoyed, you will end up compulsively overeating. I was trying to create a balance for her and proving to her that you could have your cookies every day but in moderation."

She added, "I signed her right up for Curves, and she got on her bicycle and rode to the gym and watched everything she's eating."

Ms. Werth also locks up junk food in a kitchen cabinet, and only she has the key. Lexi said she found that helpful.

Most important for Lexi, nothing tastes as great as thin feels. And that kind of motivation is something that no diet or weight-loss camp can instill in a person.

"Last winter my friend couldn't pull me on the sled because I was too heavy, and I was really upset about it," Lexi said. "This year, I went to his house and he pulled me, and that was one of the happiest days of my life."



DATeline NBC

Student Bodies

**At a new school, academics are taught—
along with a new way of life**



(Left to right) Allison Cole, Shari Lininger, Jonny Dallo, Cassi Harp are students at the Academy of the Sierras, the first boarding school with solutions for teens struggling with their weight.

Dateline NBC

Updated: 8:17 p.m. ET Aug. 19, 2005

Teenagers Jonny Dallo, Allison Cole, Shari Lininger, and Cassi Harp have left behind their friends and family and come here to Central California to the Academy of the Sierras— AOS for short. It's the first residential high school for overweight teenagers, and a place of last resort for kids who are dangerously obese.

"Dateline" will follow them on a five-month journey as they try to lose the weight that's threatening their lives, and to confront the painful reasons for their obesity. For these kids, the stakes couldn't be higher.

Jonny Dallo: The rebel 17-year-old

Jonny Dallo from San Diego weighs 365 lbs. and is worried if he doesn't do something soon he'll reach 500 lbs.

Jonny was actually close to getting a gastric bypass surgery. "We were actually about to plan a day where I was going to go and get the surgery done. I was getting tired of looking in the mirror and feeling ashamed."

At AOS, his goal is to lose 100 lbs. over the next five months. He's spending his senior year at AOS because he's embarrassed by being so big — like the time he couldn't squeeze into an amusement park ride.

"I went on to the ride and they couldn't close the lap/chest thing over me, because I was so big. They had, like, five people trying to push it down."

Difficult feelings that have taken their toll on Jonny. "Most people don't understand what it's like to be overweight because they just think, 'Why don't you just stop eating or something?' It almost feels like people think of you as like not even human," he says.

He's failing at school, gotten a pile of speeding tickets. He's lived by his own set of rules and managed to talk his way out of everything. Jonny, the rebel, won't be able to do that at AOS.

Allison Cole: The actress

17-year-old Allison Cole from Virginia Beach, Virginia weighs in at 323 lbs. Her goal is to drop at least 50 lbs. in the next five months. Like Jonny, she's come here for her senior year of high school, wanting to make a new start when she begins college in the fall. Mostly, she wants to change how people see her.

"I want to go up to people, or like go places and be paid attention to," she says. Like if I walk into a place like you start a topic with somebody and they'll just kind of blow you off a lot of the times. Like, 'Oh, you have nothing important to say, you're fat.'"

Ironically, the only place she seems to feel comfortable, is on the stage, where she can adopt a character. But Allison the actress is beginning to understand that won't always work for her in real life.

Cassi Harp: The perfectionist

16-year-old Cassi harp from Bentonville, Arkansas weighs 245 lbs. and wants to lose 60 while she's at AOS.

She loses her breath just walking up the stairs, but that's not the only thing that's exhausting her: Cassi the perfectionist is always trying to please people and food eases her anxiety.

"It's really hard to hold that image up that you're fine and nothing bothers you at all," she says. "It gets really stressful after a while and hard to balance everything."

Shari Lininger: The singer

And the youngest, 14-year-old Shari Lininger from Yuba City in Northern California would not reveal her weight. She wants to lose 60 lbs. at AOS. But her ultimate goal is bigger: "I think that I need to lose at the least like 100. It's like a whole person."

"It's an unreasonable goal to expect myself to lose 100 pounds while I'm here. My goal here is to learn the lifestyle, learn the eating habits, and go home and live like this for the rest of my life," says Shari

Shari is a singer, and she worries she won't make it to a stage some day unless she makes it at AOS.

They all have goals for losing pounds. What they don't know is that they can't lose them unless they are willing to uncover the hidden emotional weight they're also carrying.

In the next 5 months, one of them will become a homecoming queen, one will star on the stage, one will be expelled. They will all have setbacks. Each has a unique story to tell, and none of them knows what's in store.

The Academy of the Sierras

Dr. Dan Kirschenbaum is the one of the architects of the program, and he says if the kids continue to gain weight, they won't survive.

"I've worked in this field for over 30 years and I've seen people in their teens and early 20s who died from heart attacks," says Kirschenbaum.

Kirschenbaum put this program together with Ryan Craig, the AOS director.

What makes AOS unique is that every waking moment is scheduled with rigorous exercise, intense emotional therapy, and a strict code of conduct.

The kids willing to endure all that because the situation is so critical for them.

At AOS, the school tries to keep some of their time as teenagers the same, but the philosophy of the school is that the weight is a mask that you use to hide something.

Each of teenagers are hoping AOS will be the place that will be the answer to losing the weight that has plagued them since they were children.

At the start of a typical day at school, 7 a.m. is time to be up and exercising. It's one of the three hours in the day when teens exercise: One more in the afternoon, and another in the evening.

The students also keep track of their steps. Everyone wears a pedometer and 10,000 steps a day is the rock-bottom minimum. There's no telephone, no TV, no surfing the net, no video games. There's not much time for sitting, except in the classroom.

AOS is an accredited school run by a for-profit corporation. Kids are in class from 9 to 3. But the heartbeat of the place is in the cafeteria.

A new way to eat

At the school, students are served 1,200 calories of controlled food each day and only 12 grams of fat. There are low-fat bagels and soups, buffalo dogs and buffalo burgers.

For Jonny, this is going to be a challenge: He was used to four times the number of calories a day.

"Before I came here, I was on the McDonald's trip. I'd almost eat it every day after school. It would consist of three double cheeseburgers and a large fry and then a large drink," he says.

That however, wasn't his only meal. He consumed 4,500 to 5,000 a day, just of junk food.

That number of calories put Jonny and the others into a downward spiral of depression and anxiety. For a few kids at the school, it was even worse.

According to Dr. Kirschenbaum, of the 40 kids they've worked with the past year, two or three were at a significant risk of suicide.

"[The parents were] clinically stressed out to a degree they could easily qualify for serious diagnoses themselves because they are so upset about what's going on," says Kirschenbaum.

So the kids' families get a double helping of advice and less stress, as their kids change to less than half the calories they used to eat.

There's a lot of choice and every part of a meal is a learning process. Most of the students have been on every diet you could name. At AOS they're teaching kids a new lifestyle and a new way to eat, because up to now, they've all failed dieting.

"I've tried pretty much every kind of diet," says Shari. "I've tried low-fat, I've tried low carb. I've tried diet pills. I've tried exercising my butt off. I've tried doing the like Slim Fast thing too."

A big part of what's going on here is called self-monitoring: writing down everything you eat every day so if you eat too much today you can cut down or exercise more tomorrow.

Unmasking their problems

But there's much more to saving those lives than losing the pounds. At AOS, they say obesity is a mask, something that covers up emotional problems. If they don't take off the mask, they won't take off the pounds — at least, not permanently.

"This is not the end of their life, this is the beginning of their life," says Molly Carmel, the deputy clinical director. She herself used to weigh over 300 lbs. "This is not a death sentence, this is like the happiest moment. This is great for them, we're saving lives here.

Meet the teens



Student: Jonny Dallo

Age: 17 years old

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

Starting weight: 365 lbs.

Goal: To lose 100 lbs.

Motivation: Jonny is embarrassed by being so big — like the time he couldn't squeeze into an amusement park ride. "They couldn't close the lap/chest thing over me, because I was so big. They had, like, five people trying to push it down."

Challenge: Jonny's a rebel. He's lived by his own set of rules and managed to talk his way out of everything. He won't be able to do that at AOS.

Jonny was the first member of our group to face a crisis. Jonny had been with the program for only 5 weeks and already was breaking the rules: He got caught smoking.

"Honestly, I was used to getting caught. Like this place, I can get in trouble for something, and they can kick me out and I could never return to this place," he says. "And this is something I really care about."

But five days after he got caught smoking, Jonny was expelled, shipped off to Texas to an even tougher place — a wilderness intervention program run by the [Aspen Education group](#), the same corporation that runs AOS. Jonny can only return to AOS if he succeeds there.

Smoking wasn't the only reason he was booted. He broke another hard and fast rule at AOS: no dating.

"I actually got into a relationship with a girl there," he says. "That's one of the non-negotiables. That was basically the last straw."

So even though he'd lost 43 lbs. in the first five weeks— almost halfway to his goal— he was failing in the eyes of AOS. And increasingly, Jonny was failing in his own eyes as well.

"In reality, I followed the rules to my own convenience," says Jonny.

And the rules at the intervention program were even tougher. For a guy who's a bit of a germ freak, who took three showers a day and refused to eat anything from the salad bar because he didn't think it was sanitary, the wilderness was a shock.

"We use the same canteen cup, the same spoon, and the same pot for every meal," says Jonny. "We also take showers once a week."

There were no guarantees Jonny could return to AOS. "I definitely see this as an intervention," he says. "[It's a] kind of stopping you in your tracks, saying you're going the wrong path."

Shari's challenge: A talent show and a trip home

It's the beginning of spring, about two months into the program. And our three women are making great strides: Cassi the perfectionist has lost 32 lbs., more than halfway to her goal; Allison the actress is even closer to her finish line. She's lost 35 lbs., with only 15 more to go.

Shari the singer has lost the most: 50 lbs., only ten pounds from her goal.

They've all cut minutes off their mile and seen their energy go up. And they're dramatically reducing the risk of high blood pressure, one of the greatest health risks for these kids.

Meet the teens



Student: Cassi Harp

Age: 16 years old

Hometown:
Bentonville, Ark.

Starting weight: 245 lbs.

Goal: To lose 60 lbs.

Motivation: She loses her breath just walking up the stairs.

Challenge: Cassi is a perfectionist who is reluctant to admit problems. "It's really hard to hold that image up that you're fine and nothing bothers you at all," she says. "It gets really stressful after a while and hard to balance everything."

But the numbers only tell part of the story. There are other signs that Cassi, for example, is making real progress: She's taking more pride in her looks.

"I've just been wearing more dresses and stuff since I've lost weight," says Cassi.

And Shari the singer's making progress, slowly starting to pull back that mask but realizing how hard it will be to take it off completely. "I know it's going to be hard to deal with things that I've never talked about before," she says. "I've been telling myself that my weight's not a problem. I've been telling myself that I don't care. I've been telling myself that it doesn't matter to me. But it's hard to come here and realize that it really does matter to me."

Meet the teens



Student: Shari Lininger

Age: 14 years old

Hometown: Yuba City, Calif.

Starting weight: 343 lbs.

Goal: To lose 60 lbs.

Motivation: Shari is a singer, and she worries she won't make it to a stage some day unless she makes it at AOS.

Challenge: Because of her weight, Shari is self-conscious. To become a singer, she'll have to get the confidence to stand in the spotlight.

Ever since Shari was a child, she had this dream of getting up on a stage and singing. And each year, as she put on the pounds, even through her cheerleading years, she never forgot that part of her dream.

"I am 100 percent sure I really, really want to be a singer when I get older and that is totally like my life dream," says Shari.

When Shari and her AOS friend Kat saw notices for a local talent show like "American Idol," they decided to try their luck.

This was progress— getting the confidence to stand in the spotlight and not be embarrassed.

On the night of the show all the students were there to cheer them on and when Shari was on stage, it seemed like she was singing just to them.

"I was a little bit self-conscious before I went on the stage. But there's just this thing inside of me. Like, when I get on stage, I'm just like, 'Hey, you know, I am who I am. There's not really anything that holds me back when I get up on stage.'"

But her biggest test was yet to come — it was time for spring break back at home, with all the temptations of the real world and none of the rules of AOS.

Weight is a family problem for Shari, and she inherited biology—her mom's. Shari's mom Sandy Lininger, the superintendent of a charter school in Yuba City, California, has had a weight problem almost her whole life. About 20 years ago, she had her stomach stapled and lost 100

lbs. But she gained back all the weight and more. And she doesn't want Shari to suffer the way she has.

"I don't want anything to stand in the way for her," says Sandy. "And the one thing that would potentially stand in the way is her weight. Because I've seen it stand in the way for me."

Shari's family, like a third of the students' families, took out a loan to send her to AOS. At \$5,500 a month, it's expensive. They're hoping insurance will cover a portion. But Sandy says she would have sold a kidney to pay for it.

"I didn't want her to experience the prejudice that I've had to live with—like having to buy two airplane seats," says Sandy.

As Shari returns to AOS after spring break, a crisis. At home, she hadn't exercised enough and she'd indulged in some sweets. She's worried she may not reach her weight goals and achieve her dream of being a professional singer.

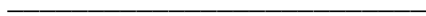
"It's a terrible feeling. Because you know that you've worked so hard to come to where you are. And nobody—no matter what they say, nobody likes to fail. Nobody likes to feel like they've done something for nothing."

After being a star one night, Shari was back at the gym the next day. And still working, along with Cassi and Allison, to take off that mask they've all been wearing.

Four months: Shedding the emotional weight

At AOS, the kids are very good at making it up. The school says the weight is a mask they're hiding behind.

For the actress Allison, being someone else is easy. Being herself is hard. Fears and anxieties usually come out in therapy. But for Allison, that's been difficult, sharing real feelings is not something she's comfortable with.



Meet the teens

Student: Allison Cole



Age: 17 years old

Hometown: Virginia Beach, Va.

Starting weight: 323 lbs.

Goal: To drop at least 50 lbs.

Motivation: She's at the Academy of the Sierras for her senior year of high school, wanting to make a new start when she begins college in the fall.

Challenge: Allison is an aspiring actress. The only place she seems to feel comfortable with real feelings is on the stage, where she can adopt a character. Therapy, which is part of the school's program, won't come easy for Allison.

"I'm not doing good in therapy at all," she says. "Like, I have a problem trusting people, like my therapist, and stuff a lot. So I haven't really talked to him that much recently."

It's still hard to talk about her childhood. When Allison was a little girl, her dad called her his "Alley-cat." but her parents divorced and very soon she heard her dad calling his new little girl "Alley-cat." she's never forgotten how that felt. Then her mom remarried and the family began to eat out for every single meal. It was fun, but fattening, and Allison's having trouble confronting this in therapy.

For Molly Carmel, the deputy clinical director, the denial is very important — it's how she's survived this long.

"Any change is good change and any realization is good realization," says Carmel. " It doesn't have to be 100 percent. Life's not about that because if we ask them to be perfect, they would certainly fail," says Carmel.

At AOS, they say anyone can lose the weight. But it's not so easy to change emotional behavior, like using food for comfort. That, they say, requires therapy— twice a week individually and twice a week in a group.

Cassi, on the other hand, has immersed herself in therapy. The pressure of being perfect had driven her to overeat. Now she says therapy has unmasked her reluctance to admit problems.

"One of my masks was like perfectionist. So if I'm doing something wrong, I wouldn't want to say it. [But now] I'm not like Cassi like perfect—I'm not perfect. And people know that."

Meanwhile, back in Texas, it slowly began to dawn on Jonny what he had done. And what he needed to do. And those thoughts so dominated his thinking that he wrote a poem to his family explaining his feelings.

Back home in San Diego, Jonny's mother, Mona Dallo, was heartbroken and hanging on his every word.

"I must have been reading this poem 30 times a day, and I would cry every time. There wasn't a day that a minute that passed by that I didn't think of him," says his mother.

Jonny's mother says the decision to send Jonny was not made without deep thought. She felt it was his last chance and she trusted the professionals at AOS.

As it turned out, Jonny did make it out of the woods of Texas and back to AOS. A thinner, but more importantly, a calmer, gentler Jonny came back to AOS.

"That was the first time Jonny ever had to really pay consequences for something that he did. And I think it was a great lesson. You can't sweet-talk the wilderness," says his mom.

The kids are usually in therapy with other students but they agreed to have a session with just the four of them so that we could listen in. Molly Carmel led the group, and they shared their realizations with "Dateline."

"I learned I have to realize what it is that's actually bothering me because at home I'd just be so upset, but I never knew why," says Shari.

She never knew why she was eating.

It took these kids only a few days here to start losing weight, but it took months to unmask the fact they were all pretending to be people they were not. For Shari, it was acting as though her weight didn't bother her, for Jonny it was acting as if nothing bothered him.

"I've had a feeling for a long time that I hadn't really experienced before, and that was being lonely. Like, that was something that was not part of my normal, like, life," he shares.

For Cassi, her mask was acting as if life was perfect and for Allison it was just plain acting.

"I realized that if like I could take on another character, I can become that character and I wouldn't feel so fat, and I wouldn't feel so ugly," says Allison. "That I could become whoever they were and be somebody else."

Now through therapy, Allison is learning to be herself and prepare for life on the outside, which is always a test.

Celebrating success

At the homecoming ball, Cassi, the former queen of perfectionism now knows she doesn't have to be flawless to be accepted. She was voted homecoming queen at AOS.

Five months since they arrived, the students find out how much weight they've lost.



Left-right: Shari Lininger, Allison Cole, Jonny Dalo, and Cassi Harp pose for a photograph on their transition day. They've collectively lost a total of 322 lbs.

Back in January, Cassi weighed 245 lbs. In June, she's lost 14 inches in her waist and reached her goal of losing 60 lbs.

Shari, the singer, who wouldn't reveal her weight before is now confident enough to tell us she started at 343 lbs. Shari lost 8 inches off her waist and 86 lbs., also surpassing her goal.

Allison, the actress, who weighed 323, lost 6 inches in her waist and 61 lbs., 11 more than her goal.

And Jonny, the rebel, who weighed 365 lbs., is a rebel no longer. He lost 17 inches off his waist and a whopping 115 lbs., 15 more than he'd hoped for.

Five months ago when they came to AOS, they all thought weight was their problem. Now they know it was masking something deeper: All the feelings they'd been hiding inside. They may look different, but the biggest transformation happened on the inside.

They're seeing people they hadn't seen before – themselves.

"I look and I see like a new person," says Jonny. "Right now, I would appear to be almost like a normal human being."

Jonny is no longer ashamed to look in a mirror, passing classes instead of failing, turning his schoolwork in on time and no longer depressed.

As for Allison, she doesn't have to always be another character. She's a lot more satisfied being herself. "I'm never going to be like gorgeous and stuff, but I don't think people are going like, 'Look at that.' I'm content with how I look and like I'm a lot more satisfied with who I am," she says.

For Allison, the hardest part will be saying goodbye to her friends.

Transition day

It was bittersweet when this first AOS class, 32 strong, gathered in June to say goodbye. They called this ceremony "transition," not "graduation," because they say you never graduate from weight control, you transition back to the real world.

The youngest member of the class, Kevin Marema, was just 12 years old. He lost 89 pounds.

The students are not worried about how they'll stay on the program once they leave here, but they're worried about leaving their support group, all the new friends who've become like family.

For Shari in particular that means her deputy clinical director Molly Carmel. "She has seriously like saved my life here," she says of the woman she now considers her friend. "I'm just amazed that she cared enough about me to do that. Even when she didn't know me that well, even when I wouldn't talk, even when she knew that I was avoiding stuff and not talking about it, she still like was there for me and she still stuck it through. She just never gave up on me."

For six months they will keep in daily touch with AOS by e-mail or phone. After all, AOS wants to know as well whether its results are lasting.

They were just a bunch of teenagers acting like teenagers, but together, they lost more than 300 lbs. Together, they gained a new way of life.

Since "Dateline" last saw the students in June, they all say they've continued to lose weight—at least 7 lbs. each. The corporation that started AOS has helped launch a pilot program with some Washington D.C. schools called "Stepping Up To The Plate." The project uses some of the methods similar to AOS to help school kids get more exercise, and eat better at home.

Producer's Note: Learning from teenagers (Susan Friedman, Dateline producer)

Last Christmas, I was assigned to do a story on the first high school for obese teenagers. These were not just kids 20 pounds overweight, these were kids weighing in the 300-lbs. range. I must admit my first thoughts were along the lines of, "How did their parents allow them to get so big?" And, since the high school is a private boarding school in a rather remote location, I was anticipating a bunch of spoiled kids whose parents wanted their kids' weight to be someone else's problem. I was so wrong.

My first visit was early in January when a new bunch of kids had just arrived. I wanted the report to be geographically diverse, and I hoped each kid would stay the 5 months to the end of the program. But, of course, there are never any guarantees. So by the end of the first day, I had asked Allison Cole from Virginia Beach, Jonny's Dallo from outside San Diego, Cassi Harp from Bentonville, Arkansas and Shari Lininger from Yuba City, California to participate. They were all enthusiastic.

It didn't take long to learn that obesity is really a cover-up for so many other problems. And as I researched the story, I was shocked by how the numbers of obese people in the general population are climbing so rapidly. When Jonny's mom told me how she'd taken Jonny to the doctor right before he started AOS and how his blood pressure was so high, I realized that all these kids were in real danger. And not only were the kids in danger, but the entire health care system is in danger with an exploding teenage obesity problem. Who will be paying for the diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems obese teenagers may eventually experience?

As we got to know the four students, I got to know their families. My original thinking could not have been farther from reality. All of the families had tried just about everything one could imagine to help their child lose weight. The struggle had been painful and heartbreaking for all of them. And as a parent myself, I know there's just so far you can push your own kid. Sometimes you need to step aside. And that's what happened in these families: sending a child away for five or more months was a joint decision. The child really wanted to change and the parent saw AOS as their last and best hope.

It was amazing to observe the changes in these kids. They dug deep to find out why they had been so out of control. After five months they looked beautiful — and they felt beautiful — and they taught all of us who worked on this project so much.

In the news business, we're always learning something we didn't know, but we never expected to learn as much as we did from these kids about the pressures of being a teenager.

And, probably equally as important as their new looks, the results of this "experiment" in weight loss are being tried in a pilot project in the Washington D.C. Schools. Aspen Education group, the parent corporation of AOS, along with CVS and Pfizer pharmaceuticals did some initial testing on kids for diabetes. Of the group participating in this project, 75 percent of the parents said their kids had increased their physical exercise using pedometers and 64 percent had changed the basic diet in their homes.

We need to thank Shari Lininger, Cassi Harp, Jonny Dallo, and Allison Cole for opening themselves to us and telling their stories. We could never have done this story without them.



Posted 6/28/2004 8:37 PM

Gain knowledge, lose weight at California academy

By Nanci Hellmich, USA TODAY

A boarding school that combines academics and treatment for obese teens will open in September on 68 acres near the Sierra Nevada mountains in California.

The Academy of the Sierras, in Reedley, is described by its founders as the first of its kind. It's designed to help teens ages 13-18, who are at least 30 pounds overweight "turn their lives around," executive director Ryan Craig says.

Enrollment is limited to 70 students, who will receive behavioral therapy, a reduced-calorie diet and access to a wide range of activities, including mountain biking, golfing and canoeing.

About 30% of kids in this country are overweight or at risk of becoming so. Such children are at a greater risk of becoming heavy adults and developing health problems such as type 2 diabetes.

But not everyone sees a weight-loss boarding school as part of the solution to childhood obesity.

"This is a family issue," says child nutrition expert Keith Ayoob of Albert Einstein School of Medicine in New York. "Since the family must also change its approach to health, nutrition, eating environment and attitude about food, I'd rather the kids stay at home and have the family making changes with the teen. I never see kids with better eating and lifestyle habits than their families."

Another concern is that the cost — about \$4,000 to \$5,000 a month — puts it out of reach of poor families. Student loans will be available, but no scholarships. Health insurance plans may cover some of the costs. Craig says he expects most students to stay a few semesters, after which they'll be monitored by a psychologist for at least six months.

"We're desperate to do something about obesity among children, and we applaud any effort being made, but we mustn't forget that the children who are the most affected are

the ones with the least resources," says Adam Drewnowski of the Center for Public Health Nutrition at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Melinda Sothern, director of health promotion at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans and a member of the academy's advisory board, says she hopes this kind of program will someday be offered "at a more affordable price."

In the meantime, the school "should get good results for overweight adolescents who haven't been able to succeed with standard treatments," Sothern says.

School officials are seeking state academic accreditation for the facility. It is being established by the Aspen Education Group, which has 15 therapeutic boarding schools for students struggling with issues such as learning disabilities and substance abuse and eight outdoor programs, including two for overweight kids.

According to the school's Web site (www.academyofthesierras.com), the academic program is college prep with required core courses, including math, English, history and science. There also are a number of electives, such as photography, auto shop and cooking. Unlike many high schools, there are no advanced placement courses for college credit.

If the school is successful, the company may open others. "To date, the only other option is summer camp, and we know it's not long enough to guarantee long-term success," Craig says. "Students tend to drop a bunch of weight and then gain it back."

The school will address:

Some teens may accelerate their weight loss with Optifast, a liquid diet meal-replacement plan, or the prescription diet medication Meridia, an appetite suppressant.

• **Activity.** The teens will wear pedometers with the goal of walking 10,000 steps a day. They will be matched with a personal trainer and encouraged to find activities that they can do for the rest of their lives, such as swimming, cycling and hiking. The school is an hour's drive from Yosemite National Park. The only TV students can watch for an extended period is in the fitness center, Craig says.

• **Behavioral changes.** Students will meet four times a week with a behavioral psychologist — twice individually and twice in a group setting. Families will spend a weekend at the school to learn the student's diet, activity and self-monitoring program.

"I view overweight people as athletes in training," says psychologist Daniel Kirschenbaum, the academy's clinical director. "Every athlete has to modify his or her body to make the body do things it doesn't want to do. They have to set goals, make a strong commitment, study the technical aspects of their sports, practice, train and get consultations about what they need to do."

They need "healthy obsessions — being very consistent about their approach to eating and staying active in order to overcome their resistant biologies," says Kirschenbaum, who is a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago.