

End childhood obesity

Written by Judge Greg Mathis
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To put it simply, Black kids are, on average, more obese than their white or Latino peers. As they age, these kids usually don't outgrow their obesity: they usually become overweight adults. A recent study found that nearly 80 percent of children who were obese between the ages of 10 and 15 were also obese once they reached 25. Overweight children and teens are at risk for developing high blood pressure and diabetes and are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke in adulthood than their thinner counterparts. Childhood obesity is a growing problem, one that must be put in check. This isn't about aesthetics. It's about health.

There are a lot of reasons our kids are overweight. Among them is today's focus on activities, such as video games and surfing the web, that don't require young people to exert much physical effort. Combine that with unhealthy food choices, whether they be quick meals put together by overworked parents or those dished out in school cafeterias, and you've created a growing health epidemic that is 100 percent preventable.

If we really care about our children, we'll work to ensure that they avoid the dangers associated with childhood obesity. Political leaders in urban areas more likely to have an abundance of fast food restaurants and very few choices for healthy eating, can work together to provide incentives to entice healthier restaurant and grocery store chains to set up shop in their communities. Education leaders must ensure that public schools provide healthy meal choices in their cafeterias.

Poor students, many of whom are African American, are more likely to eat school lunches. For many, this is their only complete meal of the day; it should be a healthy one. Parents have to shoulder some of the responsibility as well. Encourage your children to play outdoors; turn off the televisions and computers. Parks in most cities offer many free to low cost fitness and sports program for children and teens; call your local park district to learn more.

The school year has begun. There is no better time than now to turn our attention to the health of our children. As a community, it is our goal to develop these young people into well-rounded, healthy adults. We can all play a part in making that happen.

Judge Greg Mathis became the youngest judge in Michigan's history and was elected a Superior Court Judge for Michigan's 36th District. He has been called upon as a regular contributor to national television programs, including "Larry King Live," "Politically Incorrect," CNN's "Talk Back Live," "Showbiz Tonight" and "Extra" to discuss his opinions on complex issues of the day, such as national security, unique sentencing, affirmative action and celebrity scandals. He also offers his take on high-profile legal cases.