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By Dr. Ron Spiegel

Childhood obesity has become a great concern for all communities, including ours.

The number of children who are obese or overweight have more than tripled in the last two decades alone. Children who are considered obese make up about 16 percent of the youth population, while the number considered overweight is about 30 percent. Combined, that is almost one half of all our kids! We now have a public health problem.

We know that at least 25 percent of obese preschool children will be obese into their adult years. Factors influencing the weight of the child, even early in the child's life, can be significant. I recommend that families eat more meals together and include more fruits, veggies and fiber in their diet. They should also decrease the fast food, high-fat and high-salt products. Aim for one or two hours each day of activity that gets the child's heart rate up. Get away from the television and the computer and get active!

Our children will learn healthier habits if we teach them — we cannot rely on them to figure these things out by themselves. As parents and community members, we owe it to them to show them how to live a healthier lifestyle and to make good choices at the dinner table. Together, we can make a profound change.

- Ron Spiegel is a board-certified pediatrician at Snoqualmie Valley Hospital.