

DAILY NEWS

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 KIDS IN CRISIS

One pound a month

That's the goal of these determined youngsters and their weight-loss advisers

Jose Martinez is like many other 12-year-old kids growing up in New York City. The middle school student lives in the South Bronx with his parents and does well in school; he counts technology as his favorite subject. He plays soccer in the park on weekends with friends and family. After school, he can usually be found doing homework in his room, or watching "CSI." He even gets along well with his 11-year-old sister, Felin.

But a key difference between Jose and some other kids his age is in the numbers. According to his doctor's last official measurement, Jose was 5'2" and 178 pounds. That gives him a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 33, which, according to health officials, means Jose is overweight.

"That's quite high, above the 95th percentile," says Dr. Alan Shapiro, Jose's pediatrician and the medical director at the South Bronx Health Center for Children and Families, a program of The Children's Health Fund and The Children's Hospital at Montefiore.

On a recent visit to see Dr. Shapiro, the good news was that Jose has grown taller by a couple inches. The bad news is that he's now hovering around 190 pounds.

Jose doesn't think much about his weight, though. "I think I'm healthy," he says during a recent visit to the health center. The problem is that Jose's weight tells a different story.

Diabetes risk

At the American College of Sports Medicine's annual meeting this month, the results of a two-year study on childhood obesity confirmed that not only are weight problems on the rise among children, but so are cholesterol and triglyceride levels — both notable traits of cardiovascular disease and Type II diabetes.

While Jose's bloodwork isn't currently problematic, it's something to watch as he gets older. Experts say that Hispanics are more genetically prone to this late-onset form of diabetes than other ethnic groups. "His father's family has diabetes — we don't want him to get it, too," says Jose's mother, Griselda Carvajal, through a translator.

"We've been around for 12 years and we didn't see Type II diabetes in our children until the last five years or so, and now we have about eight cases at our small health

BY JULIAN KESNER
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

center," says Shapiro. "That's really disturbing. I have kids that are on kidney-protecting medications. If we have teenagers whose kidneys are getting infected now, what are we going to see when they're 30 or 40 years old?"

Exercise and diet are the two most obvious lifestyle factors that kids can change, and Jose is no exception. "I like doing exercises. I've always exercised, but it doesn't look like I do," he says. Jose plays soccer on weekends, usually for about an hour, and during the week he remains more sedentary, despite his parents' two-hour TV limit per day. "Sometimes I don't have time to exercise after school, so it's good to exercise at least one day in the week," he says.

"He still needs to lose some more weight. But this is a process."

Carvajal agrees. "I think he's exercising enough. He does as much as he can until he gets tired," says Carvajal, adding that she's now working out with her son a couple times a week.

Clothes fit better

Dr. Shapiro doesn't think Jose gets enough exercise for a 12-year-old, but acknowledges that staying fit can be tough in the South Bronx. "There's a number of issues for the kids in this neighborhood," says Shapiro. "Is it safe for kids in low-income sectors to go out and play on their own in schoolyards or playgrounds? What is the quality of the playground — is it just a dirt pit? We're lucky that our neighbor-

hood has a Police Athletic League, but a lot of communities don't have access to these kinds of facilities."

Jose typically eats a bowl of cereal for breakfast and whatever the school gives him for lunch. "Usually at lunch they give you a fruit or vegetable, then they give you some kind of meat and some bread, and then I can choose juice or milk. It's okay," he says, without much enthusiasm. As for snacking, he's quick to point out he's hardly a junk food fan. "My mom doesn't give me the money to buy soda or whatever."

Dinners have suddenly gotten much more interesting and healthful, though, thanks in part to Jose and his family having just completed the first Health & Fitness Program. The free 12-week class series is part of the Starting Right Initiative, a partnership between Bristol-Myers Squibb and The Children's Health Fund. Each class started with a 45-minute fitness session, followed by interactive lessons on nutrition, healthy cooking and even stress management.

"When the whole family is involved with the process together, it makes a huge difference," says health center nutritionist Basma Faris, who notes that 19 of 21 families completed the entire pilot program. "Our aim is to get them to make their own, healthier choices. Everyone needs to change together."

Jose and his parents attended some classes separately and some together, including a supermarket scavenger hunt and cooking classes. "No more *Pan Mexicano* [Mexican bread] — you know how much we love that, but it has a lot of sugar and fat and he has not been eating it," says Carvajal.

Mom says things are already improving. "He feels better, he's lost a few pounds and his clothes fit better," she says. "The kids at school bother him less — we have had problems with that in the past. He still needs to lose some more weight. But this is a process."

Faris says that quantitative results of the program's success, including weight loss among various family members, have yet to be measured. Still, Felin's watchful eye on her older brother may be an early indication of things to come.

"He got skinnier," she says, and smiles.

RESOURCES

For more information, contact:

Pediatric Weight Management Clinic,
St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center, The Clark Building, 440 W. 114th St. between Amsterdam Ave. and Morningside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10025. (212) 523-3211; www.wehoainy.org.

21%

of the city's children are obese by the time they're in kindergarten.

For obese children ages 10 to 13, there is a

70%

likelihood that obesity will persist into adulthood.



Jose Martinez, 12, with Dr. Alan Shapiro, medical director of the South Bronx Center for Children and Families. They meet at the center for a checkup and weight consultation.

Teaching kids to eat right

Jose Martinez and his family took part in the first Health & Fitness Program, a free 12-week instructional series developed by the South Bronx Health Center for Children and Families. Kids ages 11-14 meet for 90 minutes, once

per week, with a nutritionist, health educator and fitness instructor at the New South Bronx Police Athletic League center.

Each session consists of 45 minutes of physical activity with a PAL fitness instructor followed by 45 minutes of interactive learning, with topics ranging from nutrition and healthy cooking to emotional issues related to weight problems. Parents join their children in three of

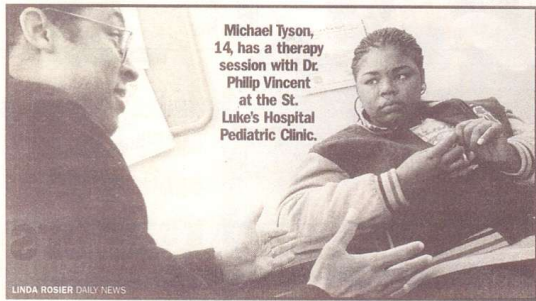
the 12 sessions, including a supermarket scavenger hunt and cooking demo by a chef. Parents also take part in two adult-only sessions.

The Health & Fitness program is part of the "Starting Right" initiative against obesity and Type II diabetes. The initiative is a joint partnership between The Children's Health Fund, the Children's Hospital at Montefiore and Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Julian Kesner



KIDS IN CRISIS



Michael Tyson, 14, has a therapy session with Dr. Philip Vincent at the St. Luke's Hospital Pediatric Clinic.

LINDA ROSIER DAILY NEWS

Improving self-image is the first hurdle

Just because dad is a famous athlete doesn't mean you're guaranteed to have the same figure and build. Just ask Michael Tyson, the 14-year-old daughter of the former boxing champ, who has struggled with her weight for years.

"Weight has been an issue since I was little," says Michael (pronounced MIK-hale). "I've tried different medicines, weight-loss camps, diets and stuff — it's really hard and it doesn't seem to work. My weight has been up and down like a rollercoaster."

Michael, a high school freshman who lives in Riverdale, is 5'9" and currently weighs about 330 pounds. In the past, weight-loss victories for Michael have often been followed by defeats.

"One summer I lost like 50 pounds," she says of the weight-loss camp she's attended for six summers. Still, "It's so hard to keep it off. When I come home, I gain weight because I'm not so active. During the winter, I gain it back so fast."

For nearly two years, Michael has been meeting with Dr. Philip Vincent, the director of the Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Consultation Liaison Service at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan. Vincent says that in Michael's case, improving her self-image is the first hurdle.

"One of the things that keeps her from exercising more is she's concerned about her weight and she doesn't want the people at the gym to see her," says Vincent. "She kind of feels that some people are looking at her and thinking negative things, even if they're not." Vincent currently has Michael on a prescription drug that contains a mild appetite suppressant.

"Even last year she wouldn't go to the swimming pool," says Kimberley Scarborough, Michael's mother. "She wasn't too happy about her appearance in a bathing suit." But Scarborough says Michael's self-esteem has improved overall recently, thanks in part to her time with Dr. Vincent.

"I'm a firm believer that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree," says Vincent. "The research shows that when the parent is actively involved in helping the child reduce her weight, the child actually loses more weight and maintains that loss as she gets older."

She's not alone

Dr. Carmen Lazala, a pediatric endocrinologist at the hospital, recently performed some tests on Michael. "She's already having insulin resistance — because of her weight, she needs more insulin to try to maintain a normal blood sugar. It's like a pre-prediabetes," says Lazala.

Additionally, Michael's HDL ("good" cholesterol) levels were at 33. "That's bad. As a woman, she's supposed to have more than 50," says Lazala. And Michael's triglyceride level, used to measure fat ingestion, is 209; the normal range is less than 150.

Vincent would like to see Michael lose about a pound a week on average, and while that seems like a long process to Michael, she at least has some specific goals in mind.

"I want to be like a size 14. I think that's a good size for me," she says. "I want to weigh about 200 pounds." In her spare time, she's designing clothes for women of all sizes under her own label, Miloti Couture.

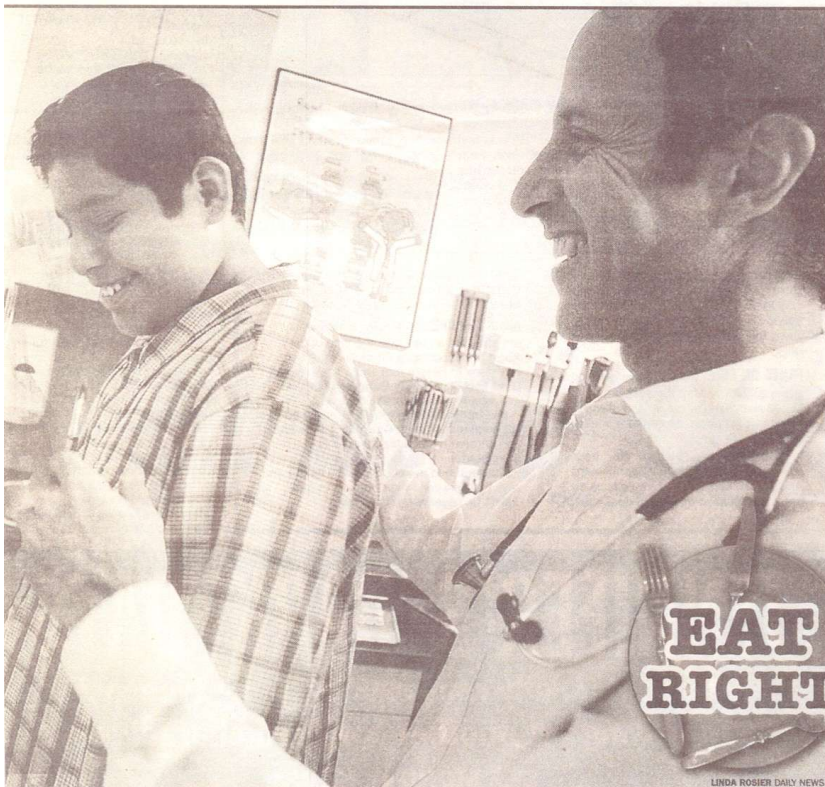
Michael also now knows that she's not alone. "I want to help other children who go through what I'm going through now," she says. "I didn't know that being overweight is such a big epidemic. I thought I was the only one." **Julian Kesner**

The plan for Michael

Michael walks the 20 to 30 minutes home from school every day, and is trying to increase her attendance at the gym across the street; she's even tried a few kickboxing classes with her mother. In addition to increasing Michael's motivation to exercise, Vincent is working with the family to revise their diet. One problem is that Michael usual-

ly skips breakfast and often snacks after dinner and late at night, eating "anything that's around," she says.

"I was raised with rice and lots of soul food," says Scarborough. "My grandmother made us stay at the table and finish our food, so that's the way I raised her. Now, with my other child, I'm doing it differently."



EAT RIGHT

RESOURCES

For more information, contact:
South Bronx Health Center for Children and Families, Montefiore Medical Center, 871 Prospect Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10459, (718) 991-0605; www.montefiore.org

Children's Health Fund, 317 E. 64th St., New York, N.Y. 10021, (212) 535-9400; www.childrenshealthfund.org

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