



## Inoculating Kids Against Childhood Obesity

Since the 1970s, the prevalence of overweight children has tripled. The key is to help children make healthier choices, says Gail Kaye, nutrition specialist for Ohio State University Extension. The challenge is how to do that in a world of chips, candy, and pizza. Kaye and graduate student Paul Branscum have taken the challenge with a new curriculum.

**“We’re teaching kids specific skills, both to build their confidence and develop a desire to make different choices,” Kaye says. “They need both.”**

They began testing their curriculum in 2007 with six lessons for third- through fifth-graders in five YMCA after-school programs in Franklin County. This year they offer 10 more lessons. Each one, scripted by Kaye and Branscum and led by Ohio State University dietetic interns and after-school leaders, includes:

- **A hands-on activity showing benefits and consequences.** “In one lesson, the kids walk around with two balls under their arms, which is pretty easy,” Kaye says. “But when we give them five balls to carry, that’s more difficult — and that’s



the problem when you get too many calories. It’s harder to move, work, and play.”

- **Modeling, which teaches concepts through observational learning and vicarious reinforcement.** According to Nancy Brody, school-age curriculum coordinator for the YMCA of Central Ohio, this is important: “Some kids have an aversion to trying certain vegetables,” she says. “But they see the intern try it, so the kids do, too.”

- **Role playing.** Kaye explains: “When we talk about snack foods, for example, we tell the kids to pretend they’re having a sleep-over, and some of their friends want potato chips. They talk about why pretzels might be better.”

Each lesson uses precise teaching techniques drawn from Social Cognitive Theory that promote behavior change.

“They’re not difficult, but they are specific,” Kaye says. And they’re fun, too.

After each lesson, the kids are offered a choice of three snacks — some healthful, some not — and are asked the reasons for their choice.

“Sure, lots of kids still choose chips,” Kaye says. “We expect that. But the exciting thing is when the kids choose the carrots instead, they say it’s for health

reasons. When we’re done with a lesson, sometimes ‘health’ overrides ‘taste,’ and that shows we’re giving these kids the tools they need to make conscientious choices.”

Results so far indicate children are learning nutrition skills and demonstrating more self-confidence and desire to execute those skills. Brody says parents are noticing the difference. “One parent said the family is making some different decisions at the dinner table as a result of these lessons. That shows us that the kids are taking this information home with them.”

“Today’s children need intervention,” Kaye says. “With this program, we think we can inoculate them against obesity.”



For more information: Gail Kaye: [kaye.3@osu.edu](mailto:kaye.3@osu.edu) or 614-292-5512



## Preparing Youth for Success

As Ohio's economy shifts from an industrial to a knowledge base, its young people need advanced skills in innovation and application of new technologies. Ohio State University Extension's 4-H Youth Development programs are perfectly positioned to deliver skills in communications, math, science, and research. 4-H already touches 320,000 young lives in Ohio and is extending that reach through special in-school, after-school, and summer programs.



# OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

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OSU Extension receives no funding through Ohio State University's state support or tuition. It is funded through a line item in the State of Ohio's budget, and receives support from counties and from the federal government.

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We work with farmers to strengthen their businesses, adopt new technology, and improve efficiency while protecting the environment.

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