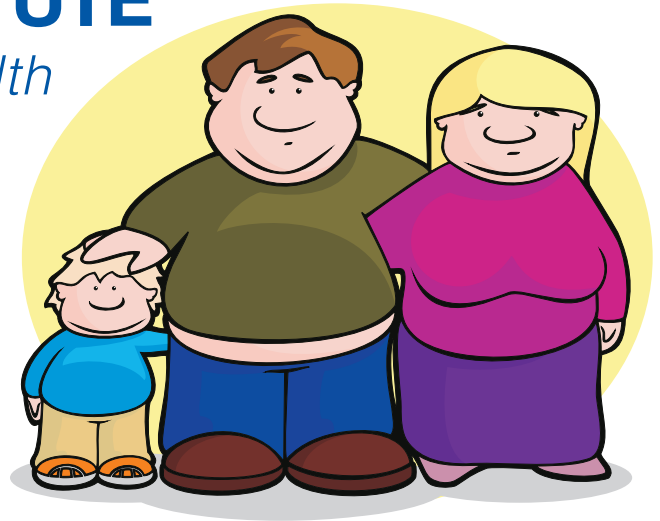




DANNON INSTITUTE®

Nutrition for Health



FOOD INSECURITY AND THE OBESITY-HUNGER CONUNDRUM

Susan Finn, Ph.D., R.D., L.D., FADA
President & CEO
American Council for Fitness & Nutrition
Finnparks & Associates
Columbus, OH

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What is the number one nutrition and health issue in the news today? Without a doubt, it's obesity. But there's another issue just as high on the national agenda, one that may not receive the same attention but nevertheless presents an equal degree of risk to our country's current and future health and well being. This issue is hunger – or, as it is called in today's policy-making circles, food insecurity.

Earlier this year, television's *60 Minutes* alerted viewers about hunger in our nation's families. This news was shocking to many Americans. We have been relentlessly focused on helping our children make healthy choices and eat *fewer* calories. School lunch and breakfast programs have lowered sugar and fat content and reduced portion sizes. And now we're told many of our children are not getting enough to eat? How can these two problems – obesity and hunger – exist side-by-side in the same community, in the same school, in the same family and, most confusing of all, in the same person?

The fact is that more than 12 million children under age 18 are not assured of the availability of *nutritious* food. Under-employment, unemployment and even poverty have crept into families where they never existed before. People who needed no assistance now frequent food banks and other catch-as-catch-can resources. These people are the definition of "food insecure." We all know that hungry children get sick more often and hunger can compromise long-term health, growth and development. Teachers and school administrators see these effects in the classroom everyday. When compared to children who are not worried about if and when they will eat, poorly nourished children have lower academic achievement, are unable to concentrate and display social and behavioral problems.

Low income is one factor behind this situation, but food insecurity – that is lack of access not only to food but also to *healthy* food – isn't exclusive to communities where incomes are traditionally below the poverty level. A child need not appear malnourished to be food insecure – and that is the key to how obesity and hunger can exist side by side.

With this obesity-hunger dichotomy in mind, school administrators must recognize the true impact of lack of resources, lack of access to healthy food, cycles of food deprivation and overeating, and stressful lives. Our children's ability to learn is critical to the future of every sector of society.

A commitment to promoting this awareness is why nutrition professionals and policy makers are such strong advocates of expanding child nutrition programs. A meal at school may be the only meal and/or the only nutritious meal that many of today's children receive.

Dr. Finn is CEO of The American Council for Fitness and Nutrition, which is dedicated to teaching children the important concept of energy balance.

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