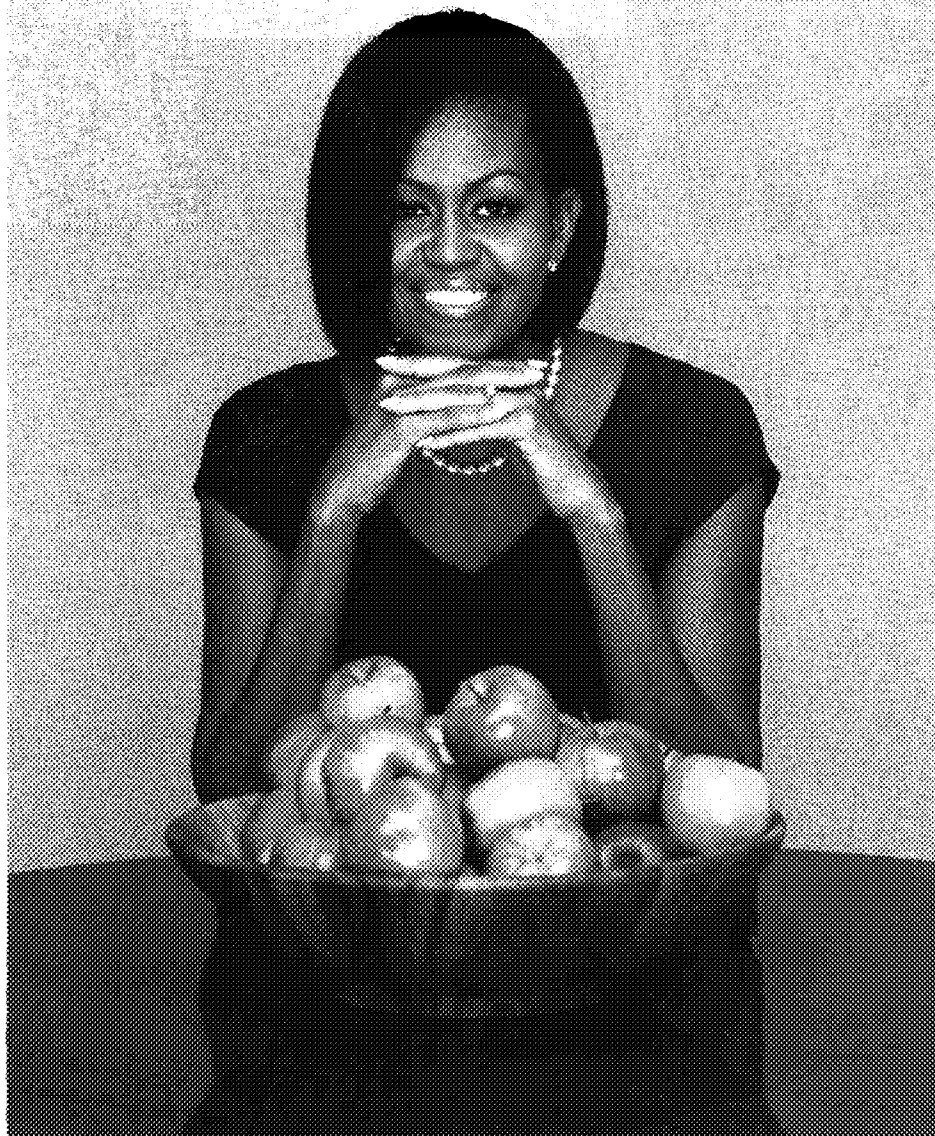


HEALTH **OBESITY**



MICHELLE ON A MISSION

How we can empower parents, schools, and the community to battle childhood obesity.

BY MICHELLE OBAMA

PHOTOGRAPH BY NIGEL PARRY

FOR YEARS, WE'VE KNOWN ABOUT the epidemic of childhood obesity in America. We've heard the statistics—how one third of all kids in the country are either overweight or obese. We've seen the effects on how our kids feel, and how they feel about themselves. And we know the risks to their health and to the economy—the billions of dollars spent each year treating obesity-related conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

But we also know that it wasn't always like this. Back when many of us were growing up, we led lives that kept most of us at a pretty healthy weight. We walked to school every day, ran around at recess and gym and for hours before dinner, and ate home-cooked meals that always seemed to have a vegetable on the plate.

For many kids today, those walks to school have been replaced by car and bus rides. Afternoons playing outside have been replaced with afternoons inside with TV, videogames, and the Internet. And with many parents working longer hours, or multiple jobs, they don't have time for family meals around the table anymore.

It's now clear that between the pressures of today's economy and the breakneck pace of modern life, the well-being of our kids has too often gotten lost in the shuffle.

And let's be honest with ourselves: our kids didn't do this to themselves. Our kids don't decide what's served in the school cafeteria or whether there's time for gym class or recess. Our kids don't choose to make food products with tons of sugar and sodium in super-size portions, and then have those products marketed to them everywhere they turn. And no matter how much they beg for fast food and candy, our kids shouldn't be the ones calling the shots at dinnertime. We're in charge. We make these decisions.

That's actually the good news—that we can decide to solve this problem. That's why we started Let's Move, a nationwide campaign with a single goal: to solve the problem of childhood obesity in a generation, so that children born today can reach adulthood at a healthy weight.

Let's Move is not about trying to turn back the clock to when we were kids, or cooking five-course meals from scratch every night. No one has time for that. And it's not about saying no to everything either. There's a place for cookies and ice cream, burgers and fries—that's part of the fun of childhood.

Instead, Let's Move is about families making manageable changes that fit

Let's Move is about getting more nutritious food into America's schools and giving parents the tools they need to keep their families healthy and fit.

with their schedules, their budgets, and their needs and tastes. It's about giving parents the tools they need to keep their families healthy and fit, and getting more nutritious food—more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and less sugar, fat, and salt—into our nation's schools. It's about helping grocery stores serve communities that don't have access to fresh foods, and finding new ways to help our kids stay physically active in school and at home.

Achieving all this won't be easy. This isn't something we can fix with a bill in Congress or an executive order from the president. I've spoken with many experts about this issue, and not a single one has said that the solution to childhood obesity is to have the government tell people what to do.

Instead, it's about what all of us can do to help our kids lead active, healthy lives: parents making healthier choices for their

families; mayors and governors doing their part to build healthier cities and states; and the private sector doing its part as well—from food manufacturers offering healthier options to retailers understanding that what's good for kids and families can be good for businesses too.

That's why I've been traveling the country, speaking to groups ranging from PTAs to food manufacturers, to elected officials, to school food-service employees, asking all of them to be a part of Let's Move. And since this campaign began, several major school suppliers have already agreed to improve the quality of their food, doubling the amount of fresh produce they serve to our children. The nation's largest beverage companies have agreed

to provide clearly visible information about calories on the front of their products, as well as on vending machines and soda fountains. The American Academy of Pediatrics has begun urging its members to screen children for obesity and

to actually write out prescriptions for parents detailing how to address it. And we've started a Web site—LetsMove.gov—with tips on eating well and staying fit.

Changes like these are only the beginning—and we've got a long way to go to reach our goals. But I'm confident that if we each do our part, and all work together, we can ensure that our kids have not just the opportunities they need to succeed, but the strength and

endurance to seize those opportunities: to excel in school, pursue the careers of their dreams, keep up with their own kids, and live to see their grandkids grow up—maybe even their great-grandkids too. That is the goal of Let's Move, and that is my mission as first lady.

NEXT ►

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH
America searches for energy independence beneath the bottom of the ocean.

BY MATTHEW PHILIPS