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Childhood Obesity: Reading Food Labels, Searching for Monsters and Journaling. A mindfulness approach for teaching children about what's in their food

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Statement of the Problem:

Children (and adults) are consuming preservatives, pesticides, and other additives found in processed foods in high quantities. Although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Dept of Agriculture report that small quantities of these chemicals are safe, safety concerns develop when they are consumed in high quantities. The saying, "a little bit won't hurt" is only true when the consumer knows how much of the preservatives, pesticides, etc. they are consuming. In reviewing Figure 1, which is a food label for a bakery item, we encounter 9 out of the 16 Monsters discussed in the What's Eating You Kid?

Program. Six of the Monsters on the label have been identified as causing anger and violent behavior when consumed in excess. Consuming different foods that contain a list of ingredients like those in the Figure 1 label throughout the day is more than "just a little bit" and a cause for real concern.

The purpose of What's Eating You Kid? is (1) to teach children (and adults) to learn what the "Monsters" are (by studying the eBook, word puzzle, Monster puzzles and flash cards), (2) to teach the effects on health from overconsumption of these Monsters and

(3) journaling (which is a mindful activity that can create awareness and change) to keep track of the Monsters using the interactive Monster Tracker Journal.

During two studies (2009 and 2010) at a preschool center and 30 summer day camps, children were taught nutrition using the My Food Pyramid for Kids along with food label recognition that were a precursor to the What's Eating You Kid? program.

Findings:

Children did not want to consume food that contained preservatives, pesticides, etc. If consuming these things were going to make them obese and/or shorten their life span. Children reacted to the information they received by insisting that their parents, "stop feeding them junk and stop killing them." We conducted parent workshops which initially led to the creation of the What's Eating You Kid? E-book and program.

(1) Children want to be healthy. (2) Journaling is a mindfulness activity creating awareness and checking impulsivity. (3) Making better choices is awareness that creates change. (4) Parents and/or guardians, schools and organizations can learn and teach this program which is suitable for all ages. (5) In 2009, obesity was reversed 100% at the preschool proving that teaching label reading and mindfulness intervention like journaling works.

Figure 1

Ingredients:

Enriched Bleached wheat Flour [Flour, Reduced Iron, B Vitamins (Niacin, Thiamine Mononitrate(B1), Riboflavin(B2), Folic Acid)], Corn Syrup, Sugar, High Fructose Corn Syrup, Water, Partially Hydrogenated Vegetable and or Animal Shortening (Soybean, Cotton seed and or Canola Oil, Beef Fat), Whole Eggs, Dextrose. Contains 2% or Less of Modified Corn Starch Glucose, Leavenings (Sodium Acid Pyrophosphate, Baking Soda, Monocalcium Phosphate), Sweet Dairy Whey, Soy Protein Isolate, Calcium And Sodium Caseinate, Salt, Mono and Diglycerides, Polysorbate 60, Soy Lecithin, Soy Flour, Cornstarch, Cellulose Gum, Sodium Stearoylactylate, Natural and Artificial Flavors, Sorbic Acid (to Retain Freshness), Yellow 5, Red 40.

Biography:

Cynthia T. Ortiz has over 15 year's expertise as a personal trainer, fitness instructor, [nutrition researcher](#) and [childhood obesity](#) educator. She was a member of Michelle Obama's Let's Move project and has been a leader in the [Philadelphia](#) and South Jersey community teaching children through the [Fitadelphia Kids](#) program since 2006. She has taught over 8,000 children at different organizations and schools, and has trained high school and college students for employment teaching the program. She is the president of the non-profit [La Placita Wellness and Education Center, Inc.](#), which was established in 2006 and provides [obesity programs](#) to the community. She was recognized by [Mamas Latinas](#) in 2012 as one of the top 25 influential mothers in the nation. She is the owner of the trademark [Fitadelphia](#) and author and illustrator of the copyrighted program [What's Eating You Kid?](#)

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Conclusion & Significance

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