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## Face the facts, parents: your kids are fat

Canada's growing childhood obesity epidemic starts and ends at home



RAMIN  
OSTAD

One of my goals over the summer holiday—aside from watching the new *Battlestar Galactica* and finishing *Final Fantasy 9*, of course—was to shave off a few pounds. After stuffing myself during finals in April, I found that I had gained a little more weight than I had anticipated.

So, like the many other poor, flabby souls who attempt to meet the ideal of physical fitness shoved into our brains through the pneumatic boob tube, I joined a gym. As I sweat away the pounds along with most of my feelings of self-worth, I swore to myself that I would never let my children suffer like me. They would live a healthy lifestyle, and I would start them on it early.

At least, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) seems to think it's a good idea. In its recently released annual report card on health care in Canada, they found that while only nine per cent of Canadian parents thought their own children were overweight, Statistics Canada showed it to be about 26 per cent. It also showed that while 40 per cent of par-

ents believed their own children to be in perfect health, almost all parents surveyed supported initiatives designed to improve children's health and activity levels—initiatives such as tax deductions for money spent on sports programs, compulsory physical activity in schools, tax breaks on healthy foods and even a higher tax on junk food itself.

These are all good ideas, and I'll be the first to attest how ineffective the school system can be when it comes to teaching children important life lessons. Providing tax deductions for sports programs is smart, since sports equipment alone can cost hundreds.

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The more you look at these initiatives, however, the more you realize that they ignore an important discovery made in the CMA's report card: parents have no sense of accountability. Not only do a large portion of them refuse to admit that their children are large-yet-not-in-charge, an even larger portion believe that "the system" should be doing the work for them.

It probably doesn't help that a group of researchers in California, based on

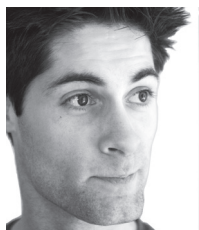
research from one of the U of A's own, have now developed an obesity vaccine designed to attack the hormone ghrelin, which helps your body store fat. Don't get me wrong: if this vaccine does in fact work, I'm sure it will be very useful for people with legitimate medical conditions.

However, I'm also fairly certain that it will be requested by lazy parents who want to fix little Augustus' weight problem without forcing him to stop eating Gloop. Before parents are given these luxuries, shouldn't they prove that they're doing more than trying to get a free ride?

In no way am I saying that keeping yourself fit is an easy gig—especially when my daily cardio routine involves going from floor to floor between my computer and my Playstation. But kids are an even greater challenge, and while clichéd, just getting them to eat their vegetables can produce disastrous effects.

But before any of that can change, parents need to realize that admitting to the problem is the first step, and that maybe their kids aren't in the same shape that their parents see them. Relying on schools and medicine to fix your kid's eating disorders isn't going to do anything but give you a vague sense of guilt relief, and only when parents decide to trim off some of their own false perceptions will their eight-year-old's love handles go with them.

## A rotten roommate can spoil your year



TIM  
PEPPIN

**"There are lots of ways in which a roommate can be bad. One of the worst ways is for them to be socially inept. On the surface, this may not seem so awful. You may think that you can take this confused young pup and show it the ropes. After all, that's what Jesus would do."**

Well, my young whelps, here you are, wearing crisp, clean undergarments which, for the first time in what you no doubt consider an impressive and wisdom-engendering 18 years, you have purchased yourself.

You're feeling overawed by what you no doubt consider an expansive and splendid campus, each building replete with burgeoning intellects and wise, white-haired professors practically tripping over themselves in their eagerness to teach classes, grade papers and engage in undergraduate debate.

You're reading your university's illustrious student newspaper, which, because of its tasteful and professional layout and colourful cover photo, you no doubt consider an organ for debate and the exchange of ideas of the greatest importance. You'll find out soon enough that this entirely not the case—probably before you even get to the comics section, assuming you haven't turned there first.

And I'll be happy to be the one to tell you. It will be a shock to learn that the majority of your peers read at an eighth-grade level; that, were you to have a seizure in class your professor would not only do nothing to help you, but would secretly harbour hope that you die; and that, despite the visualization and the pep-talk you gave yourself beforehand, after having seated yourself in front of your first midterm, you shit your pants. That's part of university, and part of growing up. Apparently it happens every year.

These things are fleeting—practically inconsequential. Classmates, professors, underpants: they're all transient. What you will be stuck with, however, are your roommates.

Diligent little knowledge-beavers that you are, you're probably reading this a few days before the start of classes, perhaps picking up your textbooks. I hope so. That means there's still time. Take it from me: if you have a bad roommate already, or you know one's moving in, move.

There are lots of ways in which a roommate can be bad. One of the worst ways is for them to be socially inept. On the surface, this may not seem so awful. You may think that you can take this confused young pup and show it the ropes. After all, that's what Jesus would do.

However, this kind of roommate, particularly if it's their first time away from home, will often use those in the house as a sort of surrogate family. You'll be furnished with unwanted details of their various emotional crises and health problems, relied upon to provide entertainment, and will awkwardly attempt to comfort them when they inevitably cry over what, to a normal adult, would seem a trifling setback.

A bad roommate may play bad music loudly; they may play video games even more loudly, neglecting entirely the wonders of the "line out" port on their computers. They may shower until the tank runs cold, and then masturbate with your conditioner, trusting—wrongly—in the combined

powers of gravity and moving water to dispose of the evidence.

Some bad roommates will drink too much and vomit in the house. Some will steal your food. Some bad roommates are too uptight to be any fun, and some are that eating gross things in front of other people will make them the Mayor of Awesometown.

Because, as you'll soon find out, at university you typically get a single specific example to illustrate a general principle, let's look at why one of my roommates was bad. We'll call him Steve, because that was his name. Today, on the one-year anniversary of having moved into this house, perhaps as a perverse means of celebration, I cleaned our fridge.

In it, tucked happily into a top-shelf corner, undisturbed for months, was a red pepper, its surface covered over with a pillowy, mottled blanket of fungus. Steve's. On the middle shelf, cowering behind a bulwark of expired plum sauce, decomposing fish, and long-expired milk (mine, I must admit), was a carton of eggs. Expiration date: 30 September. 2005. Steve's. In the freezer, an opened package of ham, the exposed meat freezer-burned so badly that it had turned white and was cracking, like flaking diseased skin. Steve's.

Needless to say, I finally kicked his ass to the curb. I sincerely hope you don't make the same mistakes I did, because Steve was a horrible roommate who ruined an entire year of my life. And that was easily the worst omelette I've ever eaten.