



# Why our Kids are Overweight

(from Layden, Tim, "Get Out and Play," Sports Illustrated, Nov. 15, 2004)

## **Geography:**

In the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Americans increasingly moved from cities to the suburbs. Kids stopped walking and riding bikes and got into cars. Routine forms of exercise were lost.

## **Fear:**

Parents who were fearful of abduction discouraged children who were inclined to leave their homes to play. The ubiquitous milk carton campaign - Have you seen this child? - made kidnappings seem much more likely than they really are.

## **Hardworking Parents:**

The increase in the number of two-income households has left kids stranded in after-school and extended daycare programs. Before, children were outdoors burning calories.

## **The Soccer Myth:**

Organized youth teams have exploded - particularly in soccer - but youngsters who join them play only a couple of days a week and get a fraction of the exercise they need, often standing around awaiting their turn in static drills. Most kids eventually slide down the talent pyramid that supplies players to traveling teams.

## **Emphasis in Test Scores:**

Cash-strapped schools, frightened by No Child Left Behind mandates, have shifted resources and class time from physical education to prepping students for standardized tests.

## **Fast Food:**

Super-sized fries cooked in saturated fat have replaced mom's baked potato. Soft drink machines have been lodged in high school hallways.

## **Technology:**

First came television, followed by cable and digital and hi-def. Video games evolved from Pong to Tomb Raider. Finally came the Internet and the IM monster. Children sit and click.

## **A Family Trait:**

The children of overweight people are often overweight themselves, and more than 64% of U.S. adults are overweight.