



# BRAIN *matters*

an e-newsletter from **THE UPSIDE NMOD**  
organization

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## A FUNDAMENTAL FAILURE? The Obesity Epidemic and Our Children

*By Frank J. Kros, President of The Upside Down Organization*

**For the first time in American history, our generation of parents may fail to deliver on a foundational promise because we've forgotten how to feed our children.**

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One of the most enduring of American values is that each successive generation should be better off than the one that preceded it. If you're a parent reading this article, it's likely that you spend a good part of your waking hours planning and sacrificing for your children's future. But for the first time in American history, our generation of parents may fail to deliver on this foundational promise — not because of gas prices, global warming or even the swelling national debt — but because we've forgotten how to feed our children.

A recent series of articles in *Time Magazine* ([Special Health Issue: Our Super-Sized Kids](#), June 23, 2008) highlights the epidemic of childhood obesity in the United States. Author Jeffrey Kluger notes ominously: "[H]ealth experts warn that the current generation of children may be the first in American history to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. "Why? Too little, they eat too much; they move

A stunning 32% of all American children weigh more than they should for their age, height and body frame. And, as Kluger emphasizes: "[A] staggering 90% of those overweight kids already have at least one avoidable risk factor for heart disease, such as high cholesterol or hypertension." ing diagnosed in kids as young as 15. Heart disease



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joint damage and brain damage —formerly the concern of the over 50 set —are now shockingly common diagnoses in pediatric clinics. "The more overweight you are, the worse all of these things will be for you," says acting Surgeon General Steven Galson.

Excess weight is a simple equation. Children are taking in more calories through food and drink than they are burning through physical activity and exercise. In the 1950s, U.S. children consumed three cups of milk for every cup of soda. Today, that ratio is reversed. Today's kids spend between three and six hours per day in front of screens (computer, television, cell phones, etc.) and only 25% of America's high school students are enrolled in physical education.

The bottom line? While there are many explanations for the truly terrifying rise in childhood obesity rates, parents must accept responsibility for what their children eat and how active they are. Gone are the days when the entire community was concerned about the health of our children, including the business community, schools, government and religious institutions. Parents now find themselves in hostile territory when it comes to their children's nutritional health as fast food, prepared food, soda and energy drinks, high-calorie school lunches, and snack foods are ubiquitous in every American community; while physical education, playing outdoors and turning off the tube are at new heights of unpopularity. Parents need the courage to say "no" and reclaim the responsibility for what their children eat and their children's level of physical activity. It's fundamental.



## How to get started? Here are three simple, but difficult to execute, ideas that will make a big difference in your children's health.

### 1. Take Stock and Stock Up

Inventory your cupboards and pantry. Get rid of the high-calorie snacks, soda, cookies and candy. Note the number of prepared food items you have on the shelves and cut it by two-thirds. Stock up on fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, raisins, brown rice, turkey, milk, grape juice and whole grains. It's hard to prevent your kids from eating unhealthy foods if they're within arm's reach. Likewise, they can't put something good in their bodies if it can't be found in your kitchen.

### 2. Eat Lunch at Your Child's School

Because lunches in public schools must follow U.S. Department of Education guidelines, many parents erroneously assume their children are "eating healthy" in the school cafeteria. Many school cafeterias are serving high-calorie, high-fat, high-sugar meals with low nutritional value. How to find out? Eat lunch in your child's cafeteria. You'll either be shocked or pleasantly surprised. If you're shocked, get on the phone or meet in person with school leadership and advocate for healthy nutrition in your school. Be polite, but be persistent!

### 3. Go Outside Every Day

Maybe the hardest of these three recommendations is this one: go outside with your kid every day for three weeks. Get them out from in front of a screen and into the grass, plants and trees. Experiment with different physical activities: walking, jogging, riding bikes, basketball, skateboarding, street hockey, and any other game or sport you can think of. The key is to help your child discover physical activities they enjoy so they will keep doing them. The greater the variety of activities you try, the more likely your child will find one that becomes an enjoyable habit. (If you go with them the first three weeks: 1) they will be more motivated to try the variety of activities you are offering, 2) less likely to "sit on a stump" until they can come back inside to the Nintendo and, 3) much more likely to continue going outdoors to play once the three weeks are over.)



Who knows, maybe you'll want to play outside more, too!

## UPSIDE DOWN WORKSHOP Ethical Responsibilities in Social Work

Social workers are confronted daily with difficult ethical decisions. Increase your ability to critically assess ethical dilemmas in the workplace, and enhance your skills in ethical decision making with this engaging, hands-on course. [Learn more.](#)

### Ethical Responsibilities in Social Work Featuring Presenter [Shawn Reagle](#), LCSW-C

**Monday, Sept. 29, 2008**

8:30 a.m. to noon

The Children's Guild - Baltimore, Discovery Park  
6802 McClean Blvd. | Baltimore

[Directions](#)

**CEU credits: 3**

Early-bird registration before Sept. 1: \$65

Regular registration: \$79

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## ORGANIZATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is a non-profit membership association of providers of foster care and child services in the state of Maryland.



MARFY provides its members with a united voice in public policy, workforce development and in increasing the standards of best practices. Members of MARFY must undergo a peer review to be sure that their programs meet the highest standards of best practices. The membership meets regularly every quarter and at other special events throughout the year to discuss and collaborate on issues that affect the field of child welfare.

The association's Training Academy is offered annually in two semesters. The Training Academy focuses on providing workshops that keep members and non-members alike well educated on all issues pertaining to child welfare. Attendees can earn CEUs for completing these workshops.

Additionally, MARFY is on the forefront of the certification of direct care workers and has instituted the "MARFY Child and Youth Care Practitioner Certificate Program" through the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). This certification program is a step toward a degree in the field of child and youth care and provides students with the opportunity to study theories and techniques in a "real world" experience through fieldwork with MARFY member agencies.

For more information about the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth, please visit [www.marfy.org](http://www.marfy.org).

## ASK FRANK

Frank J. Kros, UDO president, answers your questions about kids and the brain

**Dear Frank** // My son will be entering eighth grade this fall, and my daughter will be a junior in high school. Our life is pretty hectic, and I worry about my kids getting the proper nutrition. Are there quick-and-easy ways to improve what I'm feeding them? I'm not Rachel Ray, and I don't have a lot of time to cook. // **Time-Challenged with Teenagers**



**Dear Time-Challenged with Teenagers** // Like many parents (including my wife and me!), you're strapped for time but want to make sure your kids are getting the nutrition they need during this crucial developmental period called adolescence. Because of the incredible changes going on in the body and brain during and after puberty, getting the right amount of vitamins, minerals and lean protein is critical for optimal development.

Here are **seven** Teen Nutrition Tips that will help your teens eat better.

### 1. Breakfast is a MUST.

Breakfast is a hugely important meal for teens. You can provide or they can make a quick and healthy breakfast packed with protein by including peanut butter, cheese, yogurt, turkey sausage, nuts, eggs, milk, ham, turkey or a smoothie made with milk and fruit.

### 2. Whole Grains are GREAT!

Switch to whole-grain waffles, breads, cereals, pasta and rice. Whole grains are packed with B-vitamins and Omega-3s, and many contain high levels of fiber.

### 3. LIMIT Soft Drinks.

Our teens consume enormous amounts of nutritionally barren calories through sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks and flavored waters. These drinks help neither the brain nor the body. Get rid of them!

### 4. THINK Dark Green.

Buy dark green lettuce or spinach, and incorporate and even put it on top of burgers. Pound for pound, pack the biggest nutritional punch.

### 5. SERVE the Colors of the Rainbow.

When you are shopping and serving, strive for many of the colors of the food on the plate or in the lunch box, providing the vitamins and minerals your teens need.

### 6. BEAN ME UP, Scotty!

Add rinsed, canned beans to salads, soups, casseroles and side dishes. Teens are usually short on lean protein, and adding beans is a great way to close that gap quickly and easily!

### 7. Supplement CERTAINTY.

All teens should be taking a vitamin supplement to consistently achieve an adequate level of the nutrients they need.



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colors. The more varied the lunch box, the more likely you are to get them in great quantities.

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*If you have a question for Frank, e-mail [frank@upsidedownorganization.org](mailto:frank@upsidedownorganization.org) or subject: "Ask Frank."*

*[info@upsidedownorganization.org](mailto:info@upsidedownorganization.org), subject: "Ask Frank."*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Guide to upcoming events and Upside Down workshops

#### Aug.28

University of Maryland School of Social Work  
"A New View of AD/HD" presented by Frank J. Kros  
Largo, Md.

#### Sept.12

University of Maryland School of Social Work  
"Giving a Fish a Bath: Educating and Protecting the Adolescent Brain" presented by Frank J. Kros  
Baltimore

#### Sept.29

[OPEN WORKSHOP: "Ethical Responsibilities in Social Work"](#)  
Presented by Shawn Reagle, LCSW-C  
The Children's Guild - Baltimore, Discovery Park  
Baltimore

#### Oct.8

[Maryland Suicide Prevention Conference](#)  
"Secrets of the Teenage Brain" presented by Frank J. Kros  
Baltimore

[\[Register for an Open Workshop\]](#)

[\[Full Event Calendar\]](#)



**[The Upside Down Organization \(UDO\)](#)**, formerly The Institute for Transformation Education, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the education and advocacy of Transformation Education, an organizational philosophy and operating system for child-serving organizations. UDO offers professional development experiences, mentoring services, learning tools and organizational branding that help improve the skills of people who educate, parent, guide and care for young people.

Visit [UDO online](#), contact 410-444-5415 or e-mail [info@upside-downorganization.org](mailto:info@upside-downorganization.org).