

# Beware of the summertime weight gain among children

*By Jennifer Peck and Yvette Radford*  
*Oakland Tribune My Word*

POSTED: 06/20/2013 10:38:16 AM PDT | UPDATED: 4 MONTHS AGO

While summertime is known for bringing a rise in temperatures, it's unfortunately also become an accelerator in the childhood obesity epidemic.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that more than one in three children and adolescents are overweight or obese, and these children gain weight two to three times faster during summer break than during the school year.

What makes summer so unhealthy for so many?

For many children, school meals are often the most nutritious and stable source of food they get, and schools provide them regular opportunities for physical activity.

But what happens during the long summer months when children no longer have schools to count on?

This gap in healthy eating and active living opportunities impacts low-income children the most. A UC Irvine study documents the significant risks that summertime poses for low-income students with the triple threat of increased sedentary time, opportunities to overeat and exposure to unhealthy food.

Worse yet, these unhealthy habits overwhelmingly carry into adulthood, with 75 percent of overweight children becoming overweight or obese adults.

Not only can summer be an unhealthy time for students physically, it can be unhealthy academically as well.

A vast body of research shows that students who lack access to

enriching, high-quality summer learning opportunities risk summer learning loss. This loss in academic skills and knowledge during the summer months sets students back academically and contributes to increased student dropout rates.

The average loss in math and reading skills for American students during the summer amounts to one month per year. Children from low-income families are disproportionately at risk.

Fortunately, there are solutions to prevent summer learning loss and protect children's health during summer months -- and partnerships are key to those efforts.

Offering high-quality summer learning programs in communities where a large percentage of children receive free and reduced price meals is one important strategy. This ensures that the children and youth who need nutritious summer meals the most have access to vital nutrition and important opportunities to learn, play, and be active.

New research shows these programs are bolstering success in school, as well as overall health and well-being, for the students at highest risk.

Public libraries across the state are effectively partnering with community-based organizations to run summertime child nutrition programs that serve the dual purpose of providing children with healthy food while also engaging them in their local library's literacy resources.

While these programs are succeeding, they are insufficient to meet the great need across our state. Parents, government agencies, businesses, civic leaders and community members who care about children's academic and physical well-being need to join existing efforts to expand their reach and impact.

Kaiser Permanente and the Partnership for Children and Youth are working together to extend an active commitment to our communities' youth to ensure that all children enjoy the healthy, active and enriching summer they deserve.

To learn more about how to help, visit Summer Matters at <http://summermatters2you.net/> online and sign up to make sure children's health matters during the summer.

Jennifer Peck is Summer Matters Campaign co-chair and Executive Director of the Partnership for Children & Youth. Yvette Radford is vice president of External and Community Affairs for Kaiser Permanente, Northern California Region, and a Partnership for Children & Youth board member.