

How do you combat obesity in your child? **Claire Scobie** charts one family's attempts to live a healthier life.

the weighting game

OCTOBER 31, 2008

For the past weeks I've been wondering about the dark colourings around my six-year-old son's neck and groin. Today I found out that B is insulin resistant, which is the first sign of diabetes. It runs in the family: my dad and sister have it. The dietitian at the Children's Hospital at Westmead suggested that I place him in their child weight management program.

NOVEMBER 3, 2008 WEIGHT: 40.6KG

We had our initial assessment with the clinical nurse, Jo Henderson. At 40.6 kilograms, B is 18 kilos above a healthy weight for his age. Jo asked us about our family medical history, our daily activities and how many televisions and video games we have in the house (we have two TVs and no games). B was given a physical examination and both he and I were weighed. They weigh parents as well because they find that the parent's and child's weights often go up and down together. At first I felt really self-conscious but when I talked with B, I realised how me being weighed made him feel better, so I was happy to get on the scales.

DECEMBER 2, 2008 WEIGHT: 40.34KG

While we're cutting down, B's only lost 0.26kg. Ever since he broke his leg in September 2007, he's packed on the pounds after spending months in plaster.



JANUARY 21, 2009 WEIGHT: 38.14KG

I don't weigh B every week because I don't want his weight to become an issue for him. This morning there was movement on the scales. He's slowly becoming more himself again. Before his accident he was always outgoing. Now he won't strip his shirt off and insists on clothing that is too large for him. As a single mum I don't have time to go for beach walks with him because I'm rushing around doing washing, ironing and cleaning.

FEBRUARY 4, 2009 WEIGHT: 35KG

Today was my first appointment at the clinic. The first three sessions are only for parents, and there were about nine others. Even though it's aimed at children, the FLIP program – Family and Lifestyle in Partnership – aims to educate the entire family. They don't give the children a weight goal, but lifestyle goals. Aside from B breaking a leg, his half-Italian, half-Samoan heritage doesn't help.

FEBRUARY 18, 2009 WEIGHT: 36.77KG

We had the second parent-only session today. The

group has shrunk to six. They did a fat counter to show the amount of fat in things like a slice of banana bread – 20 grams average fat. I couldn't believe it; I thought it was a "good" snack to have. It's all down to the parents. They say that it isn't our fault, but there's a bit of guilt there.

MARCH 4, 2009 WEIGHT: 37.68KG

This was the last parent-only session. We were told about "the big five". These are: eating breakfast "most days"; no more than two hours a day of screen time; eating at least one meal a day together at the table, without the TV on; being active outside every day; and choosing water as the main drink. Except for the breakfast part, I think we can manage them. I told B that next time he's coming to the clinic and they're going to help both of us lose weight. They gave me a list of suggested after-school snacks. We don't have lots of stuff on the list because it's too expensive. I'm finding this hard financially on a sole-parent pension. I went to buy vegies the other day and broccoli was \$8.19 a kilo. I couldn't afford any of the fresh greens. Frozen is better than nothing.

MARCH 23, 2009 WEIGHT: 37.8 KG

Jo measured B's waist and he's lost four centimetres. He's happy and more confident at school now he's slimmed down. I was shocked when I saw the other children at Westmead. B is not obese compared to them. B gets embarrassed when they weigh and



Clockwise from far left
Attempting to lead a more active life; measuring up at Westmead Children's Hospital; losing weight together.

measure him, but the clinic doesn't make it an ordeal. You can break a child's confidence if you mishandle it.

MARCH 30, 2009 WEIGHT: 37.4KG

We've had six birthdays in as many weeks. The other night it was my sister's birthday. She cooks rich, so I cooked a meal for her and the family at home. At the clinic, they're pleased with B's progress. He's lost another 400 grams. Jo showed B a photo taken last November when he was much bigger. She brought out a yellow lump of rubber "fat" weighing one kilo and told him he'd lost three kilos. "That's why your pants are falling down." B laughed.

APRIL 7, 2009

I'm making changes to our meals. I've stopped doing pasta and I've changed B's lunch box, too. Now it's wholemeal bread with thinly sliced home-cooked silverside beef. The hardest part is breakfast. Neither of us is a breakfast person. I'm getting us up 30 minutes earlier so we're hungrier. We have Weet-Bix or toast and on the weekend poached eggs.

APRIL 10, 2009

Easter is at my house. I've told everyone only one Easter egg per family, and no cake or chocolates for dessert. The hardest thing is saying no to B.

APRIL 27, 2009 WEIGHT: 38.7KG

We've stopped weighing at home and now we only weigh at the clinic. I'm surprised he only put on 1.3kg over Easter. I put on 1.5kg. We saw the physiotherapist for a first assessment. B had to do a brisk six-minute walk. The physio was impressed by B's determination, but his asthma is still a problem.

MAY 11, 2009 WEIGHT: 38.1KG

B is physically more capable. His bones are getting denser and he's drinking milk regularly. He rides to school on his scooter and loves it.

JUNE 15, 2009

Today, it was my father's birthday – more cakes and ice-cream. Sometimes I'm still not 100 per cent sure about this weight issue. In Italian families, when a child is chubby, it's a good thing.



JUNE 26, 2009

Both of us have been sick this week. B had tonsillitis, I had bronchitis. After waiting for three hours at the doctor, we went to Hungry Jack's. B said, "It's no good for us." I told him I was too sick to cook.

JULY 13, 2009 WEIGHT: 38.8KG

B told me the other day he doesn't want to be fat. There is the odd time when he really does want a treat. In the supermarket this week, he saw some pizza-shaped biscuits. He said, "If I get 10 out of 10 for my spelling test, can I have a box?" I said yes. I can't be a sergeant major all the time.

AUGUST 7, 2009

I keep getting headaches and went to my GP, who checked my blood sugar. It's extremely high. If I don't change my diet, I'll end up on diabetic medication within three months, so I'm determined to push things really hard. B and I have started boxing with my sister and her husband three nights a week. We're having an apple a day along with other fruit, and we're having breakfast without fail.

AUGUST 18, 2009 WEIGHT 34KG

B has lost heaps more weight. It makes me realise how terrific this course has been; it's kick-started us. We've decided that with summer starting, we're going to go for beach walks every day. B and I are doing more exercise than ever before. I have lost two whole dress sizes and B is wearing clothes two sizes smaller than before. We are happier, healthier and having more fun together. Now it seems – wonderfully – that B is growing taller without gaining weight. ●



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