

GET MOVING!

Starting early is key to preventing obesity

“From the time they can walk, kids should be outside — running, jumping, climbing, exploring — for at least an hour a day,”

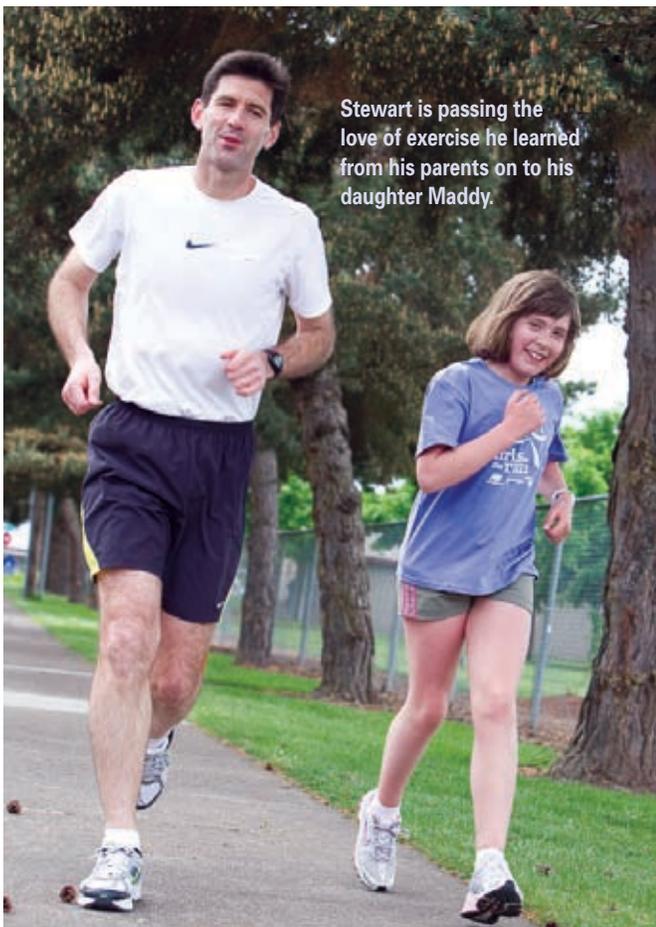
says Stewart Trost, an internationally recognized expert on childhood obesity. “But schools are cutting PE classes and children in day care are getting an average of only 16 minutes of activity per day.” In an environment that’s conducive to healthy eating and outdoor exercise, it may be somewhat surprising that in Oregon, 17 percent of young people ages 2 to 19 are obese, with an additional 16 percent at risk for being overweight. Equally disturbing news is that 25 percent of adults in Oregon are obese. And there are grave consequences — diabetes, respiratory problems, orthopedic complications, and psychological issues.

Stewart heads the Obesity Prevention Research Core in the college’s new Hallie Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families. His research involves obesity prevention across the lifespan — from establishing healthy behaviors and models for preschoolers to understanding the psychosocial and environmental determinants of adults’ physical activity. This fall, he received a USDA grant for \$1.2 million to establish the Healthy Home Child Care Project, an Extension-based intervention to promote healthy eating and physical activity for children in family child care settings.

“Interventions are more apt to be successful if they’re part of a larger community network that can refer providers to training, continuing education, and support for physical activity and health education for all ages,” he says. Another critical piece to consider is research showing that sacrificing physical education for classroom time does not improve academic performance. “Schools across the country have substantially reduced, and in some cases eliminated, physical education due to budget concerns and pressure to improve academic test scores,” explains Stewart in *Active Education*, a research brief he prepared for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “Yet the available evidence shows that children who are physically active and fit tend to perform better in the classroom, and that daily physical education does not adversely affect academic performance.”

Start Early

Child care centers and in-home care facilities have the potential to literally shape the way kids grow up, according to Stewart. “Many child care centers are reassessing their



Stewart is passing the love of exercise he learned from his parents on to his daughter Maddy.

Graduate students Paul Loprinzi and Meghan Senso help a young subject suit up for testing. "Accurate measurements of energy expenditure are essential for reliable research to present to policy makers," says Stewart Trost, who is conducting a study with 100 Corvallis schoolchildren using an accelerometer that records motion and predicts energy output. "This tool will help us measure whether programs and policies are successful in increasing energy expenditure in kids."



programs based on new obesity research, but 32 percent of children in Oregon are cared for in family child care homes, a sector that hasn't been looked at closely," says Stewart, who is currently evaluating their needs in a new study. "Providers tell us they know about the risks of obesity but can't afford the play equipment or high-priced fruits and vegetables, and they simply can't 'do it all' — that's understandable." Stewart says there are existing paraprofessional networks in communities that can partner with providers to learn about healthy alternatives for meals and no-cost activities for children. "Kids have a natural inkling to be physically active. They learn through moving, so having them sit and do nothing is counterproductive to how they want to learn and explore," explains Stewart. "And, they don't need a \$150 inflated castle in the back yard...an obstacle course with lawn furniture or a fort fashioned from a blanket thrown over a card table can encourage imagination and physical activity."

Maintain Through Life

Early in his career, Stewart became frustrated watching well-intentioned adults start an exercise regimen, then drop out. He found that many people don't exercise because they lack self-efficacy, the confidence to make plans and exercise. "They think they will look silly or don't have the skills. Then they lose confidence because they either fail to set goals or set unrealistic goals." Stewart suggests creating a "road map" with short-term goals, finding an exercise partner, and building variety in your routine.



You can find Stewart's Active Education research brief at www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active_Ed.pdf.

See the August 2008 report on Adult Obesity in the U.S. at <http://www.rwjf.org/newsroom/product.jsp?id=33833>.