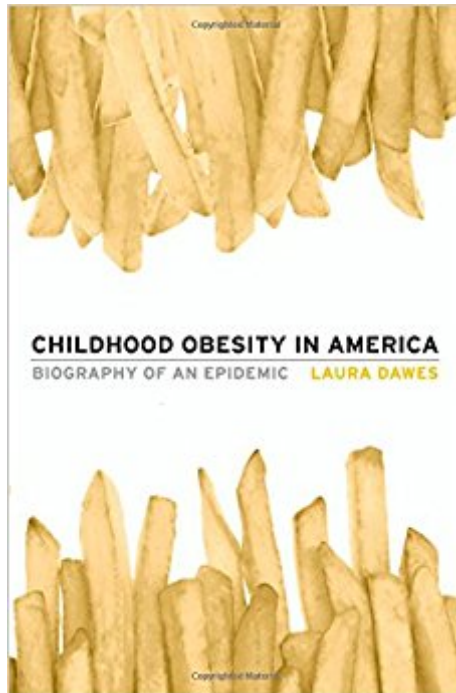




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Childhood Obesity In America: Biography Of An Epidemic



Synopsis

A century ago, a plump child was considered a healthy child. No longer. An overweight child is now known to be at risk for maladies ranging from asthma to cardiovascular disease, and obesity among American children has reached epidemic proportions. *Childhood Obesity in America* traces the changes in diagnosis and treatment, as well as popular understanding, of the most serious public health problem facing American children today. Excess weight was once thought to be something children outgrew, or even a safeguard against infectious disease. But by the mid-twentieth century, researchers recognized early obesity as an indicator of lifelong troubles. Debates about its causes and proper treatment multiplied. Over the century, fat children were injected with animal glands, psychoanalyzed, given amphetamines, and sent to fat camp. In recent decades, an emphasis on taking personal responsibility for one's health, combined with commercial interests, has affected the way the public health establishment has responded to childhood obesity--and the stigma fat children face. At variance with this personal emphasis is the realization that societal factors, including fast food, unsafe neighborhoods, and marketing targeted at children, are strongly implicated in weight gain. Activists and the courts are the most recent players in the obesity epidemic's biography. Today, obesity in this age group is seen as a complex condition, with metabolic, endocrine, genetic, psychological, and social elements. Laura Dawes makes a powerful case that understanding the cultural history of a disease is critical to developing effective health policy.

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Customer Reviews

Through anecdotes and an overview of social trends, [Dawes] provides the historical context for our

fixation [on childhood obesity], revealing shifting cultural perceptions, medical pre-occupations, scientific advances and economic forces linked to the phenomenon. By clarifying where we have been, Dawes aims to guide us forward. Perhaps health professionals' efforts to contain, control, prevent and reverse childhood obesity have been constrained by a failure to see and consider the full scope of the threat and the best defenses—that is, by the focus on one idea at a time. Dawes replaces such parochial perspectives with a window 100 years wide. May it help show us the way. (David Katz *Nature* 2014-06-05)

The goal of this book is not to offer answers, but to explain how we as a society ended up where we are. There were critical moments in the history of childhood obesity where leaders, whether medical, educational, political or otherwise, could have taken one path or another. Dawes traces the history that led to each crossroad and the implications of the path that our leaders have chosen at each of these crossroads. Given the epidemic levels of obesity in the U.S., the topic has become popular in the media, leading to enormous numbers of articles, books, TV reports, and so on. Many of these accounts come from individuals with a vested interest in swaying readers' beliefs about the causes of the issue and how to best resolve it. This book offers something different. It places many of the issues that we face as a country into a historical context to help readers understand the current state of childhood obesity. Dawes has done her job very well. The ball is now in our court. (Lisa Auster-Gussman *Books & Culture* 2014-09-03)

Dawes, a historian of medicine, dutifully catalogues society's stumbling attempts to understand and deal with this subject over the past century. She reviews many failed attempts to keep childhood obesity in check, from the endocrine vogue of the 1920s to the 1940s to diet drugs, bariatric surgery, and the leptin gene craze. Advertising geared toward making bad foods attractive to kids has been rampant and governments have done a poor job controlling it. Dawes ably demonstrates that any solutions will likely be as multifaceted as the problem. (Publishers Weekly 2014-04-28)

With vivid prose, memorable examples, and an impressive depth of research, Laura Dawes demonstrates how and why our current preoccupation with childhood obesity emerged. This book is a genuine contribution not only to historical understanding, but to the field of medical ethics and to contemporary policy debates. (Steven Mintz, University of Texas at Austin)

Childhood Obesity in America is timely and compelling. This thoughtful book reveals a great deal about the place of the child in American history, the intensity of the search for the normal body, and the overwhelming importance of aesthetic criteria in understanding the best size of the child. (Susan Lederer, University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Laura Dawes is a historian of medicine living in Cheshire, England.

Fascinating. This is a must-read for anyone interested in childhood obesity or in the history of health matters in general. It's very fresh, lively and readable and draws you in with surprising anecdotes about people, policies and procedures. The conclusions it draws about what could be done in the future are particularly apt. And it's a good-looking, nicely-produced book as well. A great read for people in many countries - not just the United States. Highly recommended.

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