

The Double Jeopardy Challenge

The Ortiz family lives on the second floor of an apartment building facing Highway 101. The concrete stairway that leads up to the apartment has a rickety wrought-iron railing that wobbles because the concrete is breaking up around the base of the footings.

We're warmly welcomed into their tidy one-room apartment with a kitchen galley next to a small diningroom table. A collection of Barbie dolls are mounted on the wall above it. Two queen size beds fill one third of their living space. Both are decorated with attractive spreads and a partial wall separates the mother and father on one side from four daughters who sleep on the other side. They've lived in East Palo Alto for nine years.



Their children receive health care at Ravenswood Family Health Center and are among 300 participants in RFHC's summer **Get Fit Challenge** to address childhood obesity in RFHC's pediatric population. The clinic has good reason for concern: 26% of RFHC pediatric patients age 6 to 9 are overweight, increasing to 34% in the 10 to 17 age group.

The Get Fit Challenge was led by Dr. Baca and organized and coordinated by two volunteers--Dana Hayse, a resident of Menlo Park, and Emily Avis, a college student home for the summer.

"Elizabeth had the idea and needed somebody to run with it," says Dana Hayse. "As an epidemiologist – I've always been interested in successful aging and in nutrition and physical activity. With the childhood obesity epidemic I know there's a real need to educate people, especially the underserved because they seem to be hit much harder by the epidemic."



Dana Hayse reviewing plans for the Get Fit Challenge with Dr. Baca

For Emily, a senior at Williams College, being a part of the initiative was a turning point. "Working with Dr. Baca, observing her with patients, cemented my interest in pediatrics and my desire to go to medical school.

Dana and Amy's eagerness to help with the project reflects public awareness of the seriousness of the issue. With the relentless steady rise in childhood obesity, public health concern has jumped from a "three alarm" to a "five alarm" health alert. A landmark study published by UCLA Center for Health Policy in 2009 confirmed that soda is one of the real culprits.

"The science is clear and conclusive: soda is fueling California's \$41 billion a year obesity epidemic," says California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA) Executive Director Dr. Harold Goldstein.

"We drink soda like water. But unlike water, soda serves up a whopping 17 teaspoons of sugar in every 20-ounce serving."

Following the lead of the Bay Area Nutrition & Physical Activity Collaborative's summer campaign to "Rethink your Drink Soda Free Summer," the RFHC designed the **Get Fit Challenge** to tackle two sources of childhood obesity. Participating families were encouraged to drink water or low-fat milk instead of sweetened drinks and, in addition, to get in at least 1 hour of

physical activity every day. They also were asked to keep track and log what they did each day on the **Get Fit Challenge** card. Those who followed through and returned the card RFHC became eligible for the raffle drawing at the East Palo Alto Farmer's Market on Saturday, September 18th at the YMCA.

Turning the Tide

When you listen to Suzanna Ortiz talk about her family's participation in the Challenge, you know it had an impact on them. "We used to drink sodas. Now I give my kids fresh water flavored with fruits or just plain water."

She prepares a drink for us. First she cooks a dried fruit Jamaica that is sold in Latino markets. This becomes the source of a natural and healthy rose-colored liquid that she adds to flavor the water to make it appealing to her children. Her daughter Gisell, drinking the water adds, "Sometimes we have melon water." As for exercise, Suzanna says, "We're walking a lot more. Instead of driving to the market, we walk a couple of miles there and back."

The Ortiz family turned in the Get Fit Challenge card for the drawing. Whether they win or not, they've turned a corner and been creative about changing their choices for the benefit of all six of them.

We thank Dana Hayse and Emily Avis for the time they put in to help our families and for assembling the raffle prizes. Our thanks Goetz Brothers, Fleet Feet Sports, Kids 4 Sports Foundation, Palo Alto Toys & Sports, Shape Up San Francisco, REI, Sports Authority and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital for contributing prizes for the raffle drawing. And a special thanks to an anonymous donor for covering the costs of graphic design and printing.

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