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Obesity A Growing Problem Among Teens

At 187 pounds, 15 year old Alley Gideon was the brunt of her classmates cruel jokes. "When I was in middle school, people would call me the Pillsbury dough girl," said Alley.

"How did that make you feel?" I asked. " Hurt," she exclaimed, " Because I'm a nice person."

Fed up with the taunting and the way she looked, Alley and her parents decided it was time for her to lose some weight. They enrolled her in the Academy of the Sierra's, a boarding school based in North Carolina. It's a school specific to overweight children and, among academics, teaches kids healthy living. "They're learning what's happening in their bodies, what's healthy for them, what's unhealthy," explained Liz Cohen, a teacher at the academy.



Academy of the Sierra students

Now on an extended field trip touring Savannah, the teens are also learning fun based activities to help them exercise. One of the biggest things Cohen says is lacking in their daily lives. " I think things like the Internet, video games, cell phones, text messaging have really begun to limit the actual outdoor activity that happens among children."

In just two decades, obesity has doubled for U.S. children ages 6 to 11, and tripled for American teenagers. The extra pounds also mean the kids have more health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. So why do they do overeat? " I emotionally ate all the time," said student Natarsha Malone.

Emotions and boredom. After the death of her mother and grandmother, Natarsha Malone gained close to 150 pounds. At almost 400 pounds, the 15 year old realized she had a serious problem. " It would make me feel bad and I would go home and eat a big bag of Oreo cookies," she said.

Learning to cope with her emotional eating habits is something else the academy is helping Natarsha and her classmates with. The one on one attention is helping these teens slim down and giving them attainable goals. "Get a whole new wardrobe and get rid of my old clothes. That would be fun," exclaimed Alley.

The program has a close to 70 percent success rate. They also teach the students how to cook, lessons they can take with them after they leave the academy. But until children learn good eating habits and get active, researchers warn, the obesity problem won't go away.