

KID-FRIENDLY SITE HAS GAMES, JOKES, RECIPES

Web Site Helps Overweight Children Get Active

BY MICHELE G. SULLIVAN
Mid-Atlantic Bureau

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Overweight youngsters and their parents can find kid-friendly but medically sound guidance to help them get active, eat well, and lose weight at a new nonprofit Web site, www.kidnetic.com.

Stuffed with age-appropriate educational material on childhood obesity, and sprinkled with games, jokes, and recipes, the eye-catching Web site presents science-based information to 9- to 12-year-olds in a "totally cool" way, while providing parents with quick and credible information, Mr. Elder, senior director of [kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com), said at a patient education conference sponsored by the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine.

While the information is nothing new to physicians who have been struggling to treat the epidemic of childhood obesity, it's far from just another boring lecture about eating too much, Mr. Elder said.

"There's a ton of information out there about activity and healthy eating, but if you look at the trends in obesity among youngsters, it's obviously not reaching people," he said. "We felt it needed to be repackaged, to be delivered in a different way. Kids want fun, and parents want credibility."

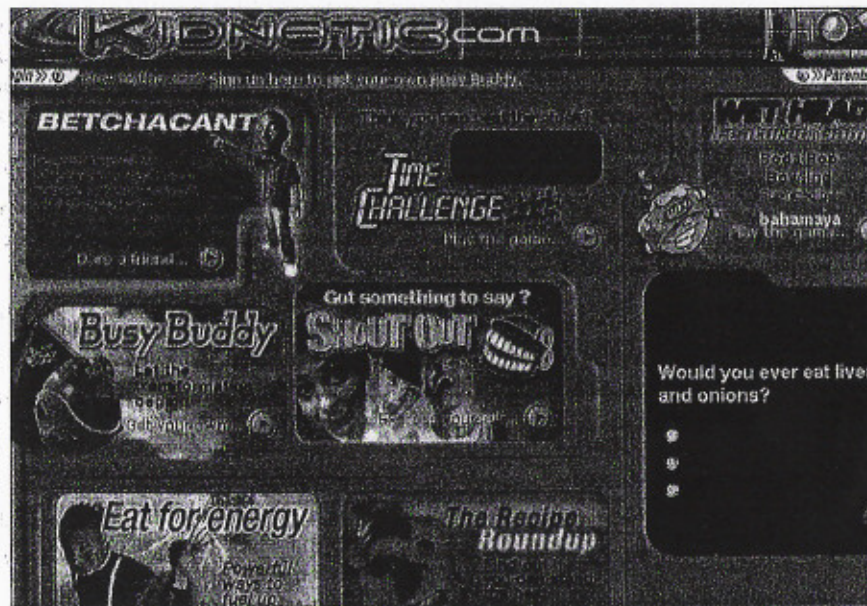
[Kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com), launched early in 2002, is the initial program of ACTIVATE, a partnership of six organizations working together to help prevent childhood obesity. ACTIVATE partners include the American College of Sports Medicine, the American Dietetic Association, the International Food Information Council Foundation, American Academy of Family Physicians, the International Life Sciences Institute Center for Health Promotion, and the National Recreation and Park Association. ACTIVATE delivers info in homes, schools, and community settings.

In 1999, the International Food Information Council Foundation launched a 2-year study to better understand children's and parents' attitudes and behaviors about preventing overweight in childhood. The research concluded that children "really don't know what 'being fit' means," Mr. Elder said. "They relate fitness to performance, being able to do better in sports, having bigger muscles, and being more popular."

The research also found that children want ideas for activity beyond organized sports, which appeal only to a small percentage of children, and that they respond to parental guidance and emotional support about eating issues. Children need small victories. "You can't give a 9-year-old a 4-year fitness plan," he said. "They need something they can realistically accomplish."

The research found that parents didn't see childhood obesity as a health issue, assuming that kids will "grow out of it." Parents also feared that concentrating on weight issues could cause their children to develop eating disorders. Family dynamics were found to play a very important part in childhood obesity. "We found that interventions would need to include the entire family, and that families wanted help in setting reasonable goals," he said.

After digesting all this information, ACTIVATE partners decided an online presence was the way to connect with children, and teamed with a Web-site designer to create [kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com). "Kids were already spending a lot of time on computers, so we figured a Web site would be a



great way to reach them," he said. "But what makes this different is that it's totally interactive and offers activities to get kids up and moving while they're online."

The site lets kids message their parents, communicate with other children on the site, and even get advice directly from experts.

Separate parents' pages offer science-based papers that teach parents how to help their children make healthy choices about eating and exercise. Parents also have a discussion board that connects them with other parents, and an expert hotline.

Although funded by unrestricted grants from some major food corporations, including Hershey Foods Corp. and Coca-Cola Co., [kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com) is a commercial-free site; no advertising of any kind appears on any of its pages. ■