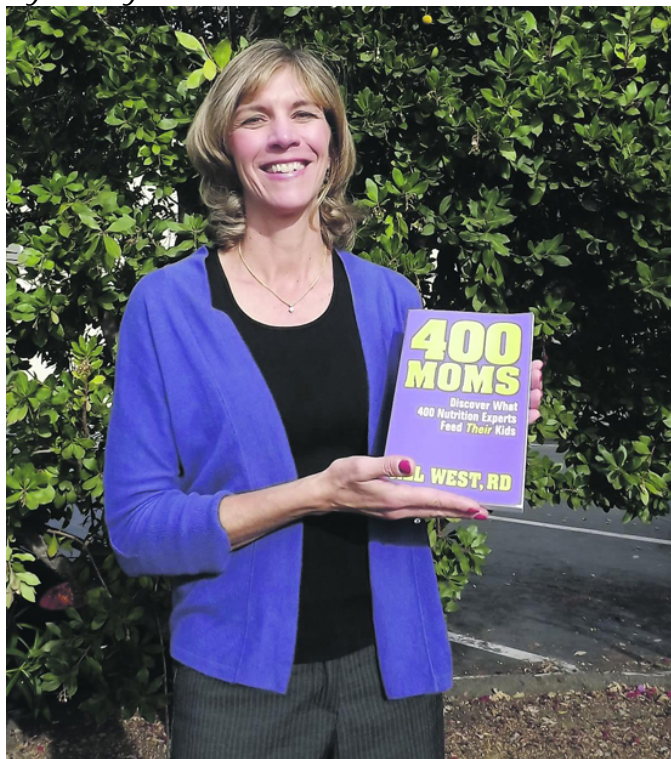


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Food for Thought from 400 Moms

By Cathy Dausman



Lamorinda resident, registered dietitian and author of "400 Moms," Jill West. Photo Cathy Dausman

Jill West is convinced that mothers are the solution to reversing childhood obesity, especially since they often act as "gatekeepers" for the food their family keeps at home. West might know - as a registered dietician, she compiled responses from over 400 other registered dieticians, mothers themselves, in her aptly titled book, "400 Moms."

A Lamorinda resident for the past five years, West is the mother of three sons aged 14 to 20. The author's inspiration came as she stood on the sidelines watching her sons play sports. When it came time for post-game snacks, West remembers thinking "all this junk for a 30 minute game?"

Children today are the first generation predicted to live shorter lives than their parents, mostly due to obesity and its complications, West said. And carbonated drinks, those West labels "liquid candy," become a "big diet villain" by leeching away the body's calcium, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.

Soft drink consumption has increased fourfold since the 1970s, while milk consumption has dropped in half. Although there is some controversy related to cow's milk consumption, there are healthy alternatives available like rice, soy and almond milk.

Don't get West started on sports drinks either. "400 Moms" reads more like a "Nutrition for Dummies" manual than a preachy laundry list of unattainable New Year's resolutions, with bite-sized chapters and oversized type, peppered with a healthy serving of charts, graphs and

illustrations.

There is even a thumbs-up logo to highlight nutrition ideas. Chapters cover breakfast, lunch and dinner, snacks (snack bars good and bad), dessert, portion control and fast food and restaurant choices. Much of the book's input may surprise you. Of the registered dieticians surveyed, most (85 percent) feed their children a breakfast of ready-to-eat-cereal, and pasta is the quick go-to dinner meal for more than half (62 percent).

West further fine tunes the information by suggesting the tastiest (for kids) nutritional choices. She notes Lamorinda's rate of childhood overweight and obesity (ages 2-19) is less than half that of western Contra Costa County (15 percent vs. 42 percent), attributing that data to many factors, including the area's economic well-being and opportunities for physical activity.

West hopes to see families modeling good behavior, but knows that "reading [nutritional] labels" can be both a blessing and a curse. Although aimed at parents, West says her book is also "a useful guide for grandparents and the truly childless." She offered a Cliffs Notes summary of her book, citing:

- Breakfast every day;
- Encourage five fruits and vegetable servings daily;
- Stop serving sweet drinks;
- Trim down fast foods.

West admitted, tongue in cheek, that while the book has reached its target audience, it opened to somewhat mixed reviews, if the grocery shopping family she witnessed carting her book around is to be believed: "Oh mom," wailed the child in tow, "don't read that book!"

"400 Moms" (www.400moms.com) is available at Amazon, Orinda Books and Rakestraw Books in Danville. West is scheduled to speak on the subject at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 30 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

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