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Post hosts summit on childhood obesity epidemic

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A third of American children are overweight or obese. That startling statistic and all its health and economic implications have created a groundswell of action from the White House to school cafeterias across America.

Last week, Washington Post Live hosted a conference on the health crisis called “Weighing In on America’s Future: Childhood Obesity Summit.” Those in the auditorium and watching online heard how children have become so sedentary that they don’t even know how to jump rope, and how our “all you can eat” culture has led to an alarming rise in diabetes in children.

Celebrity TV chef Carla Hall proved you don’t need a lot of money to make tasty meals. Decked out in her chef’s apron, Hall cooked the lunchtime meal for \$2.32 a plate — the amount the federal government spends on many lunches provided in school cafeterias. On that tight budget, she whipped up chicken pot pie, tossed salad and a poached pear topped with rosemary oat crumble.

Eating well affordably was also the message of Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan. Her advice: Don’t get paralyzed in the grocery store aisles about which kind of apple or tomato to buy. Just buy fruits and vegetables (and wash them). A mom herself, Merrigan advised parents not to think in terms of “good foods and bad foods.” As she noted, “If I start making foods prohibited, then they become very attractive.”

Greg Jennings, the Green Bay Packers wide receiver who scored two touchdowns in this year’s Super Bowl, took the stage to congratulate local students who won a KidsPost contest that sought their ideas for curbing obesity. Read today’s KidsPost (on the back page of the Style section) to learn from the winners, including the 11-year-old who wrote that kids need to learn to prepare meals because “many parents grew up eating fast food so they may not even know how to cook.”

Jennings and other football players at the event urged children to join the “Fuel Up to Play 60” program, which urges children to exercise 60 minutes a day. He and just about everyone in the audience got into the spirit and exercised between panel discussions, loosening ties and kicking off high heels for jumping jacks and scissor kicks, all in the name of powering a movement to make Americans trimmer.

— **Mary Jordan, editor, Washington Post Live**