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When Peanut Butter & Jelly Just Won't Cut It

Publishers are responding to the childhood obesity epidemic, but are parents listening?

by Lynn Andriani -- Publishers Weekly, 2/13/2006

More than nine million American children and adolescents are overweight and at increased risk for developing high cholesterol, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes. It's a scary fact, but a big opportunity for publishers, who are filling their lists with guides for parents on keeping kids healthy and active; titles on treating obesity; and books on living with diabetes. Though consumers have shown lackluster interest in the titles so far, the size and seriousness of the childhood obesity epidemic suggests the subject just might spawn the next big parenting bestseller.

According to a projection by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the percentage of children between the ages of six and 11 who are overweight doubled between 1976 and 2002; among kids between 13 and 19, the percentage tripled in those years. Today, a shocking 16% of all Americans age six to 19 are overweight. Linked to these statistics is the fact that one in three children born in the U.S. five years ago are expected to become diabetic in their lifetimes (the forecast is even gloomier for Latinos: one in every two). While Type 1 diabetes is believed to stem from genetic factors, and Type 2 is also tied to genetics, the latter can, in many cases, be delayed and possibly prevented through exercise and weight loss.

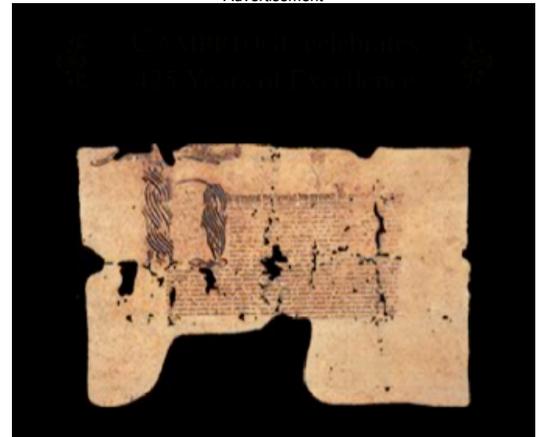
So the market's there. The question is: Can publishers can find a book with the right combination of sensible advice, approachable tone and, perhaps most importantly, marketability?

The Obesity Problem

The editors at Wiley's For Dummies imprint think they may have a breakout book in *Conquering Childhood Obesity For Dummies* by Kimberly A. Tessmer, Michelle Hagen and Meghan Beecher, which they'll publish in July. "Overweight babies, children and adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight adults. Based on this staggering information, we felt the need for a book under our brand," says Tracy Boggier, acquisitions editor for the consumer Dummies group. The publisher released *Diabetes for Dummies* in 1999, and followed that with a second edition in 2004.

Joyce Pepple, acquisitions director for the consumer Dummies group, agrees there are challenges to publishing books in the children's health arena. "When there's a hot topic, a lot of people are interested in publishing into it." But she believes she has a unique product. "The Dummies brand is very compelling. It's making information that people need accessible to them, solving their problems,

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making them successful."

One book that will compete with the Dummies title is *A Parent's Guide to Childhood Obesity: A Roadmap to Health*, edited by Sandra Hassink. The American Academy of Pediatrics will publish the book in paper in August with a 10,000-copy first print run. Mark Grimes, director of the AAP's department of marketing and publications, observes that "One of the biggest challenges to publishing books on child health and well-being overall is finding experts who have access to authoritative information and presenting that information with a style and tone that is informative, balanced [and] reassuring."

Along similar lines is Prometheus's entry into the field: *Child Obesity: A Parent's Guide to a Fit, Trim, and Happy Child*, by Goutham Rao, M.D. Also a paperback, the book is being published this month with an announced first printing of 15,000. Executive editor Linda Greenspan Regan is clear about the book's goal: "We oppose the idea of hype. This book does not promise a magic bullet for overcoming this serious problem. Rather, it promotes understanding the causes and how to overcome it in a sensible, practical and safe way, based on the latest studies."

Stopping Obesity Before It Starts

While genetics play a role in how people get diabetes, in many cases individual behavior—i.e., taking care of one's body with proper nutrition and exercise—can delay and possibly prevent the disease. Nutrition is one of the biggest categories within the children's health arena, not surprisingly because neglecting it can result in a host of problems in addition to diabetes.

Annabel Karmel is probably the biggest name publishing in the children's nutrition field this season; the British author with 14 bestsellers to her name came stateside with *Favorite Family Meals*, which Atria published last month. Three more of Karmel's titles—*100 Top Baby Purees*, *Superfoods for Babies and Children* and *Annabel Karmel's Complete Party Planner*—will ship later this year (it's the first time the publisher has released four books by one nonfiction author within a year). Karmel's philosophy is that the one element parents can control that can determine their children's health is what they eat. Mediagenic and possessing a stack of magazine clips—from publications ranging from *Hello!* to the *Times* to *BBC Good Food*—the author is a shoo-in for American TV and magazines; she's already lined up features in *Child* magazine, *Real Simple*, *Woman's Day* and *Working Mother*.

Other media-savvy authors with their eye on children's nutrition and childhood obesity are publishing books this spring and summer, too. One is Claudia González, whose *Gordito Doesn't Mean Healthy: What Every Latina Mother Needs to Know to Raise Fit, Happy, Healthy Kids* is due from Berkley in April. González is a Miami dietician who writes on health and nutrition issues for Univision Online, MiDieta.com and *Shape en Español*, and has appeared on CNN, CNN en Español and other news programs (see sidebar, p. 53). Another is "renegade lunch lady" Ann Cooper, a frequent speaker on healthy school lunches who collaborates with such organizations as Alice Waters's Chez Panisse Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's IATP Fellows program. HarperCollins will publish Cooper's *Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children* in August.

Lesser-known experts are also presenting books to help parents keep kids on a healthy track, starting with Ronni Litz Julien, whose *What Should I Feed My Kids?* will be published by New Page Books in April. While Julien may not pull Karmel or González's weight in media spots, she does make regular public appearances to speak out on nutrition in Miami, where she lives.

Other forthcoming titles encompass children's nutrition as well as other aspects of raising healthy kids. Among them are *Complete Guide to Family Health* by Paul C. Reisser, M.D., which Tyndale/Focus on the Family will publish in April; *Superfoods for Children* by Michael Van Straten and Barbara Griggs, which DK will bring out in June; *Caring for Kids: The Complete Guide to Children's Health*, edited by Norman Saunders and Jeremy Friedman, coming from Firefly in April; and *Just Two More Bites! Helping Picky Eaters Say Yes to Food* by Linda Piette, a July release from Three Rivers Press.

Creeping into the Mainstream

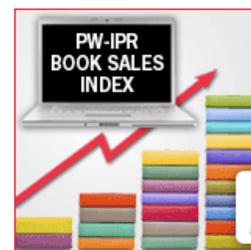
Diabetes has long been considered a quiet scourge in American public health circles; it doesn't receive the fanfare bestowed on more high-profile afflictions like lung cancer or AIDS. That may be because diabetes, on its own, is not fatal. But its symptoms and complications certainly can be: if diabetes is not controlled, it can lead to problems with blood pressure, circulation and the kidneys. It's estimated that 151,000 children in the U.S. have diabetes, and the disease is appearing with

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such frequency that it could actually lower the average life expectancy of Americans for the first time in more than a century. Still, says Abe Ogden, managing editor of the book publishing arm of the American Diabetes Association, "A lot of people don't take diabetes very seriously."

Yet diabetes and its possible causes are serious problems. In January, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles on diabetes in New York (the city has seen the number of diabetics swell by 140% in the last decade). It followed up with a related story, "Playtime at the Health Club" (Jan. 22), noting the fitness industry's increased interest in the children's market thanks to "an epidemic of overweight children." As the *Times* articles and others point out, obese children not only endure teasing and social shunning by their peers, but are also susceptible to debilitating diseases.

While Ogden attributes the rise in the number of diabetes diagnoses partially to new screening techniques and heightened vigilance, he also believes children have become more at risk. "Lifestyle is a big part of it," he says. "There are things you can do to either prevent or, more than likely, delay the disease." Even if a child has diabetes, he adds, "eating right, exercising and taking medication will reduce the chances that you'll have complications."

The ADA will publish *101 Tips for Raising Healthy Kids with Diabetes* by Patricia Geil and Laura Hieronymus in June. The book, which is aimed predominantly at parents of children with Type 1 diabetes, features a section for parents answering questions they may have not asked their doctor, such as "Is diabetes contagious?" Ogden says the first printing will be between 5,000 and 10,000 copies. "The audience isn't that big," he admits. "You have 20 million people with diabetes, but only 5% have Type 1. Unfortunately, that pool seems to be growing, so that might change in a few years."

Ogden explains the typical book-buying cycle for a diabetes patient by referring to an "inverted camel's hump." As soon as a person (or his or her child) is diagnosed, he or she saturates themselves with information, buying a number of books on diabetes. "Then [their interest] dips down," he notes, until "maybe 10 years later, when they have complications, and they go back" to seek out information again.

Other publishers with new books for kids on diabetes include Scarecrow Press, a member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group. In May the Lanham, Md., house will publish the paperback edition of Katherine J. Moran's *Diabetes: The Ultimate Teen Guide*. The book is part of Scarecrow's 15-part It Happened to Me series, and, according to acquisitions editor Kim Tabor, "is written in teen speak," with chapter titles like "What Is This Diabetes Anyway?" and "The Freedom of Pumping!" (insulin, that is). Despite Tabor's enthusiasm, however, the first printing is even lower than that of the ADA's forthcoming book for children: Tabor estimates it to be around 1,500 to 2,500 copies.

And Now for the Bad News

Publishers seem to unanimously agree that childhood nutrition, obesity and diabetes are important subjects that they need to address—as do parenting magazines and news weeklies, which run endless streams of stories on the subjects. Yet, say booksellers, parents aren't buying.

Kris Kleindienst, owner of Left Bank Books in St. Louis, Mo., confirms that she has seen an increase in titles on managing children's weight. But, she says, "Unscientifically, so far, I have not seen an increase in sales." Linda Bubon, co-owner of Women & Children First in Chicago, concurs: "We don't stock a lot of books on the subject, and I haven't fielded a lot of requests for books about it." There's a similar story coming from the chains: Borders public relations manager Beth Bingham says, "Although the topics have been prevalent in the media, this has not translated into a surge in sales on books about these subjects." She notes that media coverage doesn't often make mention of books on the subject.

Left Bank's Kleindienst thinks it's a matter of "the right book with the right media at the right time. Like Oprah or something, to sort of bless a book or anoint the topic." She does stock a few books on childhood obesity and diabetes, for when a shopper comes in looking for a book their doctor or therapist recommends. But overall, she says, "They're not impulse buys."

Meanwhile, the market for adult books on nutrition is booming. Perhaps the thinking goes that if Mom has purchased a book to help her alter her own eating habits, she's feeding her kids healthy food as a result and therefore doesn't need one just for kids. There's also the possibility, as Kleindienst notes, that parents are incredibly busy: "Reading a book, let alone doing everything it entails, is just impossible." She continues, "I think this obesity issue is so complicated, and I think

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that the parents are overwhelmed and possibly in denial." All of which could mean fat profits for publishers who can help parents feel a little less overwhelmed by the issue.

Reaching the Latino Market

Claudia González's voice raises a few octaves as she imitates a mother cooing over her baby: "*Gordito!* Such a fatty boy! My chubby, happy little baby!" Dropping back down to normal range, she explains: "It's a very cultural thing" for Latina mothers to see chubby babies as healthy babies. But this deep-rooted belief is taking its toll on children—especially Hispanic ones. "Our children are more overweight than any other group in the United States," González notes. The reason for this could owe as much to socioeconomic factors as to varying cultural standards of beauty or what is acceptable weight.

González points out that in addition to rocketing obesity rates, six out of every 10 obese Latino children have Type 2 diabetes. That's why the Miami dietician, along with health writer Lourdes Alcañiz, has written *Gordito Doesn't Mean Healthy: What Every Latina Mother Needs to Know to Raise Fit, Happy, Healthy Kids*, which Berkley will publish in simultaneous English and Spanish editions in April.

The book explains nutrition for children of all ages, with advice specific to González's audience. There are anecdotes from mothers who complain that *their* mothers worry little José is "too thin"; as well as menu suggestions for kids that include such Latino staples as avocado, black beans, flour tortillas, mango juice, papaya, queso blanco and yucca. Although the information is undoubtedly sound, what sets the book apart is its recognition that Latinos face cultural barriers to weight loss that other groups may not have to deal with.

Abe Ogden of the American Diabetes Association agrees there is a market for Spanish-language books in this area. The ADA has translated a few of its titles, including *Diabetes A to Z (Diabetes de la A a la Z)* and *101 Tips for Staying Healthy with Diabetes (101 Consejos Para Estar Sano Teniendo Diabetes)*. "We're looking into doing more in Spanish," he says, but "the problem is that there's a need for information in Spanish, however most people aren't looking to books." Ogden finds more people seek out information online or from handouts they receive from doctors and clinicians.

Still, González is confident that she'll be able to lure readers, maybe even through the online channel Ogden says people look to (González's book's Web site, www.latinosinshape.com, will launch next month). She has written an important book in language that's accessible to her audience, and has many contacts in both Hispanic and American media. "I've been interviewed by hundreds of people over the years"—people she hopes will return to hear her new message. —L.A.

Do Mom and Dad Know Best?

Now, more than ever, adults are willing to admit that they need help with the demands of parenting—whether it's providing proper nutrition or making sure the kids get into the top schools. The following titles demonstrate the breadth of topics covered in this rapidly expanding category; for a more complete listing, see www.publishersweekly.com.

Just as the number of stay-at-home dads escalates, so too—to judge from this season's offerings—do books on various aspects of fatherhood. With a sense of humor in tow, dads-to-be can improve the prenatal experience with **The Caveman's Pregnancy Companion** (Sterling, Apr., \$12.95 paper) by David Port and John Ralston, with Brian Ralston, M.D. Every "cave-student" is given tools to deal with his mate during this emotional time and to handle his own unexpected feelings, along with tips for helping out during labor and delivery. Sam Martin parses fatherhood with a modern twist in **Bringing Up Baby: A Modern Man's Guide to Fatherhood** (Perigee, May, \$14.95 paper), whereby dads can learn the difference between a binkie and a bottle, as well as discern that breast pumps are not sex toys—among other survival tips and bits of droll advice. For a more, er, enlightened approach, consider **Crouching Father, Hidden Toddler: A Zen Guide for New Dads** (Chronicle, June, \$9.95) by experienced dad and aspiring guru C.W. Nevius, illustrated by Beegee Tolpa. Brief essays expound on such Zen riddles as "What is the sound of one child napping?"

Popularity-seeking fathers can turn to **Be the Coolest Dad on the Block: All of the Tricks, Games, Puzzles, and Jokes You Need to Impress Your Kids** by Simon Rose and Steve Caplin (Broadway, May, \$11.95 paper). An assortment of successful sons and daughters—including George H.W.

Bush, Bob Costas and Marlo Thomas—share paternal anecdotes in **My Dad and Me: A Heartwarming Collection of Stories About Fathers from a Host of Larry's Famous Friends** (Crown, May, \$19.95) by talk-show host Larry King.

Postpartum depression captured headlines this past year when Tom Cruise blasted actress/model Brooke Shields for using medication to handle her bout with an illness that affects 400,000 mothers annually. Author Sandra Poulin, a survivor of postpartum depression, offers her insights, along with those of hundreds of other mothers who have shared this experience, in **The Mother-to-Mother Postpartum Depression Support Book: Real Stories from Women Who Lived Through It and Recovered** (Berkley, Mar., \$14 paper).

To balance the stress and anxiety common to most mothers-to-be, women can redirect their energies toward the baby's bedroom using feng shui, the popular Chinese system that organizes one's environment with maximum harmony in mind. **The Peaceful Nursery: Preparing a Home for Your Baby with Feng Shui** (Delta, Feb., \$15 paper) is by sisters Laura Forbes Carlin and Alison Forbes, who are co-founders of a home and lifestyle consulting business, The Art of Everyday Living.

Once a child leaves the harmonious home environment, parents have to navigate a world of outside influences on their children. Among the forthcoming titles addressing this topic is **Queen Bee Moms & Kingpin Dads: Dealing with the Parents, Teachers, Coaches and Counselors Who Can Make—or Break—Your Child's Future** (Crown, Mar., \$25) by Rosalind Wiseman with Elizabeth Rapoport, which offers advice on whether or not to get involved in your child's conflicts with other kids, parents, etc., and indicates how your handling of parties, sporting events and academic performance impacts your son or daughter. **Whose Game Is It, Anyway?** (Houghton Mifflin, Mar., \$15 paper) promises to help parents ensure that their children have a positive competitive sports experience. Authors Richard D. Ginsburg, Stephen Durant and Amy Baltzell analyze an array of athletic situations that arise from early childhood through college, ranging from parental pressure and being on a losing team to relationships with coaches and the use of steroids. In **Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers' Schemes** (St. Martin's, Aug., \$24.95), Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown look at how culture and the media influence young girls' appearance, their likes and dislikes, their aspirations and eating habits—and tell parents what they can do about it.

Getting the kids into private schools and colleges, which has long been a fiercely competitive process, is intensifying—and starting earlier. Here's a title that may appeal to some and appall others: **Raise a Smarter Child by Kindergarten: Build a Better Brain and Increase IQ by Up to 30 Points** (Morgan Road, Aug., \$23.95) outlines techniques for strengthening the appropriate parts of your child's brain. Author David Perlmutter, M.D., outlines the myriad factors that can affect a child's IQ, from nontoxic pacifiers to fish oil supplements for nursing moms to exposure to computers and television.

And speaking of television, here's another book that can either make you cringe or give you reassurance: **The Elephant in the Living Room** (Rodale, Sept, \$24.95) by Dimitri Christakis, M.D., and Fred Zimmerman makes the case for using TV as a positive tool in your child's growth and development. And who better to exemplify a constructive media influence than that beloved TV icon Fred Rogers? **Many Ways to Say I Love You: Wisdom for Parents and Children from Mister Rogers** (Hyperion, Apr., \$16.95) collects excerpts from previously unpublished speeches and observations about the importance of children and the role of parents.

The mother-daughter connection continues to be a hot topic, as demonstrated by the current Random House bestseller, *You're Wearing That? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation* by Deborah Tannen. Coming in April from FSG/North Point Press is **It Hit Me Like a Ton of Bricks: A Memoir of a Mother and Daughter** (May, \$23), in which actress Catherine Lloyd Burns, whose credits include *Malcolm in the Middle*, *E.R.* and *Law and Order*, charts the volatile relationship she had with her mother and reveals how giving birth to her own daughter transformed that connection.

Still not sure if kids should be in your future? Check out **Maybe Baby: 28 Writers Tell the Truth About Skepticism, Infertility, Baby Lust, Childlessness, Ambivalence, and How They Made the Biggest Decision of Their Lives**. (HarperCollins, Apr., \$24.95), edited by Lori Leibovich, foreword by Anne Lamott. This anthology from Salon.com quotes such major media guns as Rick Moody, Kathryn Harrison, Dani Shapiro and Neal Pollack, who weigh in on everything from infertility and having only one child to gay parenting and choosing to be childless.—**Hilary S. Kayle**