

How Bill Put the Fizz in the Fight Against Fat

Slimmed down and scared straight after his bypass surgery, Clinton brokers a deal to get sugary drinks out of schools. And that's only the beginning

By **JEFFREY KLUGER**

IF YOU HAD GROWN UP TAKING YOUR SUNDAY lunches at Bill Clinton's great-uncle's house, you would have developed a weight problem too. The former President's beloved Uncle Buddy knew how to put out a spread that included a ham or a roast, corn bread, sweet potatoes, peas, lima beans, fruit pies and unlimited iced tea.

A big-boned Southern boy couldn't help plumping up on such fare, eventually growing into a teen who, by his own description, was "fat, uncool and hardly popular with the girls." Although the 42nd President remedied the coolness problems, the matter of the fat dogged him ever after. From his yearnings for fast food to the quadruple-bypass surgery that eventually laid him low, Clinton has long been a one-man case study of the U.S.'s food crisis—the compulsiveness, the consequences, even the shame.

And now he might be the face of recovery. The Clinton Foundation, the American Heart Association

and the nation's three biggest beverage manufacturers—Coke, Pepsi and Cadbury Schweppes—have announced an agreement to begin rolling back America's growing obesity epidemic in the place they can do the most good: the schools. Beginning now and progressing through the 2009-10 school year, the manufacturers will kick high-calorie, sugary drinks out of school vending machines and replace them with bottled water, unsweetened fruit juices, low-fat milk and sugar-free sodas—all served in smaller portions. And that's only the first move in Clinton's campaign to fight fat. His foundation is planning to turn its attention next to vending-machine snack foods and cafeteria lunches and is even in negotiations with fast-food companies to reduce the fat in their restaurant fare.

The soda deal, in the meantime, will affect at least 35 million school-age children, and by any measure it comes none too soon. Two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, and so are a shocking 17% of kids, with another 15% at risk. Children who start life fat often stay that way, with all the attendant health consequences. Kids as young as 10 are turning up with obesity-related Type 2 diabetes, which used to be known as the adult-onset form of the disease. The Clinton-backed plan would cut off a significant part of the sugar stream that's causing those problems.

Next, work should get started on cafeteria food, which, since 1946, has been subsidized by the National School Lunch Program. The law imposes general nutritional guidelines, but they are broad enough to let plenty of fried, fatty and starchy foods slide through. The Clintonites plan to bypass the government and negotiate directly with catering companies, purchasers and school nutritionists. Negotiations with fast-food restaurants are focusing less on adding healthy menu items that kids don't often eat and more on cutting back the fat and calories in pizzas, fries and other favorites. ■

Questions

1. Why do you think Bill Clinton is committed to reducing children's intake of fat?
2. What organizations are collaborating on Clinton's new initiative to help cut kids' intake of fat, and how will this initiative affect schools?

