



Let us make
healthy food
choices the easy
choices

THERE are many role models people look to in their day-to-day lives when it comes to weight loss.

At the Obesity Policy Coalition, our role models are the people who have pushed back against the status quo to make choices that support a healthier lifestyle and who have lost weight (and maintained it).

Or those who have not put on weight in the first place.

These are not people whose faces fill glossy women's magazines, or whose latest act of excellence on the sports field or in the pool is lauded.

These celebrities, both local and international, not only have their sporting or acting achievements celebrated, sometimes it's their weight loss achievements too.

Olympic swimmers such as Geoff Huegill, Ian Thorpe and Libby Trickett have all spoken about their weight loss after getting back into training, post-retirement, for a huge event like the Olympic trials.

Some of their achievements are

quite amazing, like Huegill's 45kg drop in weight, or Thorpe's loss of 20 per cent of his body weight.

While we congratulate them for their amazing weight loss, these people have had a great deal of help.

As elite athletes they are able to do hours of training. Then there are the dietitians, personal trainers, coaches and managers encouraging them every step of the way.

How realistic is that for the average person?

It seems, looking at these swimmers, that when their tough training regimens end, the reality of life catches up with them (and causes weight gain).

It's something we can see repeated on TV. How many contestants on *The Biggest Loser* regain their weight after the show, when the reality of life catches up with them?

No more personal trainers. No more competing for prizemoney.

Just the challenge of being time-poor, making the food budget stretch and dealing with requests





from kids for sugary cereal, or the latest movie character toy in the fast-food meal deal.

RECENTLY, I read how *Desperate Housewives* Syndrome has hit Australia. Many middle-aged women are reportedly starving themselves in order to stay as thin as the stars of the TV show.

In one article about the syndrome it was mentioned that at least one of the cast ordered particular meals from certain restaurants instead of eating from the catering truck.

Reportedly, many celebrities — Oprah is one — have live-in personal chefs. This is not attainable for working mums and/or dads on a limited budget with limited time.

Every day, Australians are bombarded by media and advertising related to food.

How quick, easy and convenient it is to grab a bucket of chicken or a pizza rather than cooking a quick and healthy meal for the family.

The campaigns hit the purse

strings and emotions simultaneously — busy mums deserve a night off so why not forget the calories, salt and fat in junk food and get that easy, cheap meal?

Similarly, if they decide to go to the supermarket, rather than order a pizza, then the marketing of that two-for-one deal of corn chips with added guarana (helping to boost energy), or low-fat chocolate bars may get you.

Why don't we see these regular two-for-one deals on lettuces? Or apples? Or green leafy salads?

Given that ordinary Australians are not elite sports people, competing in a reality show or Hollywood actors, some things need to change.

It's time to ensure that the supports are in place to make the healthy choices the easy choices. These include reducing the price of healthy food for those least able to afford it, and to ensure processed foods are labelled in a way that helps people to understand whether levels of fat, salt and sugar are high or not. To bring kilojoule labelling into

chain fast-food menus so you can compare meal combinations at a glance and make healthier choices. Then parents will see what the healthy choices are.

We also need to tackle some of the drivers of unhealthy eating, such as marketing to children. A key focus should be to get junk-food sponsors out of kids' sport to send a consistent message around healthy lifestyles to our children and reduce pester power for parents.

It's now time for the Australian and Victorian governments to become weight loss role models. The OPC is asking them to reduce advertising of unhealthy food to children, improve the labelling on processed foods, and to look at price levers to support healthy eating.

This is important not just for the health of the nation, but to break up the link between wealth and health, to make weight loss and healthy eating options available to all.

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