

The NY Daily News Article
Helping kids get a leg up on obesity

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Former Rockette Helen Butleroff-Leahy is doing her own legwork to help combat the growing obesity problem in city children. The dancer-turned-dietician is directing "The New Food Guide Pyramid," a musical on the benefits of healthy eating starring city students at five schools this month. "The obesity situation in this country is horrific," said Butleroff-Leahy, who also performs. "Diseases like diabetes that struck people in their 50s is surfacing in younger people. I have a mission now to help children learn about nutrition." Butleroff-Leahy signed up Broadway actor Roumel Reaux of "The Wiz" to play a rapping angel who wakes two girls who doze off after inhaling salt-soaked fries and supersized sodas. "You've got the power, you've got the might to eat right and keep it light," he advises, marching the sleepy junk-food addicts through the food groups. Fourth-graders at each school act as leafy greens and hold up caution signs when discussing fats. Butleroff-Leahy shows off her Radio City experience as Mable, the calcium-praising cow. The student actors rehearsed once a week for two months, and must complete a questionnaire after the show to prove they understand the pyramid. "I'll try to cut down on Snickers," said 9-year-old Jacqueline Michetti who played a cartwheeling cucumber at PS 186 in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, last week. Butleroff-Leahy came up with the idea while a nutrition student at New York University and piloted the play at PS 1 in Brooklyn. She secured a \$20,000 grant from the Ficalora Foundation, a not-for-profit in Queens, to produce the play in five other schools and is seeking more funds to expand the program. She already completed shows at PS 163 in Harlem and PS 142 on the lower East Side. Performances also are planned for this week at PS 129 and PS 123, both in Harlem. Originally published on December 11, 2005