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*Your Health Connection*



# Health MATTERS

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## One little ion for healthy teeth

*Fluoride is a valuable  
tool in fighting  
cavities.*

Cavities are so common that we tend to think of them as minor annoyances. But tooth decay can do significant harm. People with decayed teeth can suffer from social isolation, absenteeism or poor performance at work and school. Untreated cavities can limit food choices and cause infection leading to serious health problems. For children this is especially important. Early tooth decay could set a child up for lifelong challenges.

Fortunately, advances in knowledge have reduced decay rates since the 1970s.

One of the major breakthroughs was the discovery of fluoride's protective properties. Fluoride is found almost everywhere on earth; in water, rocks and soil. Fluoride ions bond with a variety of other materials – such as the minerals that form your tooth enamel.

That's the magic of fluoride. It hardens tooth enamel. When acids and bacteria break down the enamel of teeth and cause decay, fluoride helps rebuild it.

### How to get your fluoride

Dentists have fluoride treatments they can apply to your teeth. Fluoride compounds are included in toothpaste. You can also buy over-the-counter fluoride rinses.

Frequent exposure to tiny amounts of fluoride provides the best protection against decay. If your community has fluoridated water, you're in luck. Fluoride is added at the municipal water treatment



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plant. It takes just 0.7 parts per million to protect your teeth against decay and cavities. Research into fluoride has been going on for more than 60 years. In all that time there has been no evidence that it poses any risk to health. It's the safest and most efficient way to give you and your family fluoride treatment, and it adds to your protection when it's included with good dental health habits.

### Start your children early, and their dental health will last a lifetime.

- ◆ Make sure your child brushes at least twice a day, for at least two minutes each time.
- ◆ Use a soft bristle toothbrush—one to fit your child's size.
- ◆ For children up to three years, use only a smear of fluoridated toothpaste on the brush. After age three, a pea-sized amount of toothpaste is right.
- ◆ Have your child spit out excess toothpaste after brushing, without rinsing; that way some of the fluoride stays on the teeth for added protection.
- ◆ Remind children to reach back far enough to clean those important molars – they're meant to last a lifetime.
- ◆ Take your child to the dentist every six to nine months for a regular check-up.
- ◆ Set a good example by brushing and flossing your own teeth properly.

If you can't afford a dentist and need treatment, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit can help you obtain financial assistance.



# From Taboo to Table Talk

*There is no question that some subjects are hard to talk about, especially with our children.*

Drug use, mental health, relationships and sexuality can make most parents feel a bit in over their heads. Most of us aren't experts in these areas but we all want our children to make healthy, safe decisions when the time comes to make choices.

How you say it is just a small part of the message. A willingness to start early with plain, honest language makes sense.

Answering the “where do babies come from?” question matter-of-factly at age five or six can keep the door open to questions later on about becoming sexually active, birth control, sexually transmitted infections and sexual orientation. Your answers to questions—on any topic—just need to be factual, without being overwhelming with details. This sends the message that your child can come to you with questions.

Teachable moments, like a friend's pregnancy or a neighbour dealing with depression, are opportunities to see what children might already know. This allows you to fill in the gaps or correct misinformation. If you aren't sure of the answers, exploring the topic online or at the library together is another way to make the topic talkable.

## When the messenger changes...

As children move into grade school their sources of information change. Messages will come from peers, books, television, ads, TV programs, video games and movies, to name a few. You can help.

- ◆ Talk about media messages, such as alcohol commercials. Teens are the target of a lot of advertising and indirect marketing; this provides you with an opportunity to open a discussion about the conflicting signals they may be getting.
- ◆ Discuss what they might hear from other sources. You can help your child question assumptions about behaviour like “everyone smokes pot” or “it's just oral sex.”



- ◆ Be sure what your child is asking. “What is a condom?” doesn't necessarily require a half-hour explanation of procedures and the choices on the drugstore shelves – but it could.

## ‘The Talk’ with your teen

Talking with teenagers about drugs, alcohol or sex can be more challenging than talking with younger children. Even though they may not make it easy, they are definitely hearing what is said and watching what you do. And they need your guidance.

If this is your first open discussion with your teen about these issues, all the pointers still apply. Teenagers are in the process of growing up and there are increasing pressures and influences coming to bear on them. They are more vulnerable if they don't have good facts to rely on.

Children are hearing our messages even if, as teenagers, they may appear to dismiss our knowledge and experience when we share it. If we stay silent about these issues, children will apply their own meanings about them.



## Need somewhere to start? Try these internet sites.

- [www.thephakz.ca](http://www.thephakz.ca) from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
- [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca) from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada
- [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net) The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has helpful advice on a wide range of topics

# Sexual orientation and your child

*Do you have a teenaged child who has revealed that he or she is gay, lesbian, or bisexual? Perhaps your child is uncertain and questioning their sexual orientation.*

Your child is not alone, and neither are you. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual (LGBT) is a reality for five to 10 per cent of the population. With about 50,000 students in Simcoe and Muskoka, as many as 5,000 are not heterosexual. It's how they were born, not something they chose along the way.

Canadian law accepts that all people in all walks of life are equal. In fact recent media coverage about same-sex marriage has positioned Canada as a global leader in tolerance of all sexual orientations. The shift is happening throughout society.

## Your support is critical

As a parent, you want what's best for your child. Your love and caring are as important as ever. Your child's sexuality doesn't change the crucial role you play in his or her development.

Your teen may feel they are perceived as being "different." They may worry that people in their social circle will not understand or accept them for who they are. This can be a major source of stress. You may have mixed emotions yourself. It very likely means changing your expectations.

Here are some ways you can support your teen:

- ◆ First off, realize this is an opportunity for both of you to grow together.
- ◆ Listen to your teen's feelings. All teens have ups and downs; days when they feel different from everyone else. You can become a safe place where your child knows they can share their concerns.
- ◆ Talk with your teen often. Ask how you can help. Coach them on how to work through problems.
- ◆ Respect your teen's privacy. However, if your child feels it's time to "come out," that's good too. Being sure of who you are is a trait of successful people.



- ◆ Lead by example. Talk about the sexuality issues that affect your teen, family and community. With encouragement, others may add their support.
- ◆ There may be times when your teen faces homophobic attitudes from others. A recent study found that 64 per cent of LGBT students feel unsafe at school. Bullying, violence and discrimination are not okay! Help your teen prepare for these situations so they know what to say, what to do and where to go for help.
- ◆ Look for safe supports in the community – and advocate for more. For example, many schools have gay-straight alliances where students come together in a safe setting and work on a culture of acceptance in school. The health unit can assist your teen's school develop a variety of strategies that will help create a place where students feel safe and supported.
- ◆ If your teen is having difficulty coping, seek advice from professionals with skills in mental health, well-being or stress management.

With your love, support and understanding, your teen will grow happily, find supportive friends, build good relationships and succeed at school, work and in the community.





# Create a healthier environment

## Simple. Safe. Clean. Natural.

*Children may be exposed to a variety of substances where they live, learn and play, both outdoors and indoors.*

Everyday activities like cleaning, dusting or using various consumer products could expose children to certain contaminants. Childhood behaviours such as mouthing toys or crawling on floors may put children at a greater risk of exposure compared to an adult.

Understanding the potential risks in a child's environment will help reduce exposure and provide a safe and healthy environment for children.



### Simple

Some plastics may contain hormone disrupting chemicals like bisphenol A (BPA) or phthalates. Phthalates are used in plastic toys, clothing or utensils to soften plastic or allow it to bend easily. These chemicals may leach into foods or beverages. Simple choices can reduce a child's exposure.

- Choose stainless steel or glass instead of plastic.
- Use glass or lead-free ceramic instead of plastic to reheat food or beverages in the microwave.
- Disposable plastic containers are single use only. Plastic items with the numbers 2, 4 and 5 are the safest for reuse.

### Safe

Choosing activities and toys that limit a child's exposure to harmful chemicals will help create a safe, healthy environment.

- Inspect old toys and games to ensure there are no loose or damaged parts.
- Use non-toxic craft supplies and always follow instructions.
- Provide adequate ventilation during arts and crafts.
- Do not let children chew on soft bath or inflatable toys, key chain pendants or jewellery. They could contain phthalates, BPA or lead.
- Safe choices also extend outdoors. Holding activities during extreme heat extreme cold is not good for your child's health. Always check your local weather forecast and air quality reports prior to planning outdoor activities.

### Clean

Children breathe at higher rates than adults and as a result, exposure to airborne contaminants will be greater. Dust may contain contaminants that could be inhaled or ingested by children when they crawl or play on surfaces where dust could land. While indoors:

- Ensure good ventilation.
- Do not smoke.
- Choose less toxic cleaning products.
- Adjust daily cleaning activities to include wet mopping instead of dry mopping. This will reduce the creation or disturbance of dust.
- Outdoor air quality is harder to control. Making an effort to not idle your vehicle will help reduce air pollution and improve the outdoor air children breathe.

### Natural

Some foods and consumer products like personal care items (perfumes, soaps and shampoos) and air fresheners may contain harmful chemicals. Many of these chemicals can be ingested or absorbed by our skin.

- Choose unscented personal care products.
- Limit the use of antimicrobial soaps.
- Choose unprocessed and low-fat foods and wash your fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Limit the use of commercial air fresheners.

