



Health MATTERS

June 2005

A thriving garden—without pesticides

With the arrival of spring we dream about making our lawns and gardens look beautiful again.

Many people think they need pesticides (insecticides, herbicides and fungicides) to grow a healthy lawn or garden.

While it is true pesticides can help with a green lawn, they can also have a negative effect on your health. Some studies suggest that pesticides could be responsible for some birth defects, cancers, kidney and liver damage and might trigger asthma attacks.

Plan for a pesticide-free garden

With a little effort and pre-planning you can have your lawn and gardens looking beautiful all season, without using pesticides or worrying about your health.

Begin a tour of your lawn and gardens when conditions are right.

Your local garden centre can help you choose the plants and grass that are best suited to your yard. Different plants and grass seed grow better under certain conditions, and choosing the right one can make a big difference.

Throughout the summer continue to cut away dead plant material, prune plants that are growing rapidly and continue to pull weeds by hand.

Mulching and watering

Maintaining nutrient-rich soil and watering your lawn or garden are the foundations of a healthy lawn. Keeping your mower height at

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Don't give pests a chance

- ✿ Take stock of your garden and cut away dead plant material from perennials and remove any clumps of wet leaves.
- ✿ Add a fresh layer of compost to your garden beds and plant your new items for a fresh look.
- ✿ Rake any debris and brown patches away from your lawn and hand pick weeds.
- ✿ Spread organic fertilizer at the first sign of growth to give your lawn the nutrients it needs to be healthy.

about seven and a half centimetres allows grass to hold moisture better and gives shade to the soil.

Mulch is an excellent material to help reduce the need for watering and keep control of weeds. Leave grass clippings on your lawn to reduce the chance of weeds and to provide fertilizer for your lawn.

The amount of water your lawn or garden needs depends on the type of soil. As a rule, sandy soils require about four centimetres of water per week and clay soil needs two and a half centimetres per week.

Following these few tips will help you keep a healthy lawn pesticide-free.



For more information you can call **HEALTH CONNECTION** at (705)721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and speak with a public health nurse, or visit our website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

Every day counts with cervical cancer

When it comes to the early detection of cancer, every day counts. That's especially true with cervical cancer because cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable with early detection. A Pap test can pick up precancerous cells.

Regular Pap tests can be a lifesaver

Pap test is recommended annually for all women as soon as they start having sex or are 18 years of age. The test can detect changes in the cervix before they become cancerous or when they are at a stage when treatment can be effective. Since the introduction of the Pap test more than 25 years ago, the death rate from cervical cancer has dropped almost 50 per cent.

A Pap test takes only a few minutes and can be done during a visit to a health care provider. Once three consecutive normal results are received the screening can be scheduled every two years—including throughout menopause—until the age of 70.

However, most women who develop cervical cancer have not been screened in the three years prior to their diagnosis. This year about 1,450 Canadian women will be diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer, and approximately 420 women will die from the disease. Women who are older (40 to 59), immigrant or Aboriginal women as well as those who have a lower socio-economic status are at a higher risk of developing cervical cancer, mainly because they have not been screened at all or have been screened irregularly.

Risks for cervical cancer

We know now that most cervical cancers are caused by specific strains of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV infections are the most common sexually transmitted infections today.

Risk factors that make a woman more susceptible to HPV and in turn more susceptible to cervical cancer include higher numbers of sexual partners, younger age of first sexual intercourse, HIV infection, smoking and long-term use of oral contraceptives.

Protecting yourself

You can protect yourself from cervical cancer by having regular Pap tests. Women who have had a hysterectomy and those past the age of menopause should speak with their health care professional regarding the need for a Pap test. You can also protect yourself by limiting the number of sexual partners, being aware of your partner's sexual history and using condoms.

For more information about prevention and early detection of cancer, talk to your health care provider. You can also call *Health Connection* or click www.simcoemukokahealth.org.

Immunization — not only for children

Immunization is the best way to protect yourself against some very serious diseases, including tetanus, diphtheria, bacterial pneumonia and influenza.

While you are probably good at keeping your children's immunizations up-to-date you may not be aware that you are due for a booster shot too.

Tetanus can be deadly for everyone

The Td booster, which protects against tetanus and diphtheria, is needed every 10 years. Tetanus, more commonly known as "lockjaw" is caused by the tetanus bacterium. Tetanus bacteria are found everywhere in our environment and can live in soil, dust and almost anywhere else.

The bacteria can enter your body through a small cut, burn or wound and can then grow in numbers to produce a nerve poison that causes painful tightening and damage to muscles. This damage often begins in the face, affecting the jaw, which is why the nickname "lockjaw" arose.

Tetanus kills one out of every five people who get it, even with early treatment. Immunization is the only way to protect yourself from tetanus because there is no natural defence against it. Protect yourself from this deadly disease by getting the shot.

What is diphtheria?

The "d" in the Td booster is for diphtheria, a disease caused by bacteria that infect the nose, throat and skin causing breathing problems, nerve damage and heart failure. The bacteria are spread through close, direct contact between people. For example, when a person who has diphtheria coughs or sneezes, the bacteria may land in the nose or throat of another person. When diphtheria infects the skin, the disease can be spread through direct contact with broken skin.

Diphtheria is a serious disease that is still widespread and kills 1 in 10 people who get it. The years slip by as adults; check with your health care provider to see if you are due for your Td booster.



Protect yourself from the flu

Influenza (flu) is a serious respiratory disease, especially for older adults and people who have certain medical conditions that could make them much sicker when they catch the flu. It is important that the flu is not confused with the "common cold" which is a less serious disease that does not have a vaccine. In Canada, the flu kills thousands of adults every year.

All healthy adults should receive a flu shot every year, not just to protect themselves but to protect their families, friends and co-workers. If you get the flu, you might bring the virus home to someone who is not as healthy as you are, or who is at high risk, like a baby, an older relative or someone with an underlying medical condition who may have a difficult time recovering from the illness. The best way to reduce your chance of catching the flu or passing it on to others is to get a flu shot every year.

Pneumococcal vaccination for everyone over 65

Pneumococcal disease is caused by a group of bacteria that can infect the lungs (pneumonia), the blood (bacteremia), and the lining of the brain (meningitis). The bacteria have become resistant to some antibiotics, which makes treatment difficult.

Vaccination is an important step to prevent pneumococcal disease. All adults over 65 and those under 65 with a medical condition that increases their risk of serious infection should receive the vaccine. Usually, only one dose of the vaccine is needed but for some people a booster dose is recommended after five years.

For more information on adult immunization contact your health care provider, click www.simcoemuskothealth.org or talk to a public health nurse by calling *Health Connection*.



Let's tighten the belt on portion size

We know that healthy body weights are linked to a lower risk of developing chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes.

To get and keep a healthy body weight, it's important to build healthy meals and snacks into every day. In the past few decades, however, there has been a rise in unhealthy weights among Canadians. An increase in the portion sizes of foods served at home and in restaurants is thought to play a part in this trend.

The serving sizes given in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating can help you build healthy meals and snacks. The Food Guide uses the term "serving" to mean a specific amount of food; for example it says that half a cup of cooked rice or pasta equals one serving.

Gauge your energy needs

Canada's Food Guide recommends five to 12 servings of grain-based foods like breads and cereals, five to 10 servings of vegetables and fruit, two to four servings of milk products and two to three servings of meat or meat alternatives every day.

A range in the recommended number of servings for each food group is provided in the Food Guide because everyone has different energy and nutrient needs. These needs depend on age, gender, activity level, body weight and whether you are pregnant or breast feeding. The more physically active you are the more food energy (calories), you require to fuel your body. That's why very active people should choose a number of servings close to the high end of the range for each Food Group.

Healthy serving sizes

You can become familiar with what a Food Guide serving size looks like by measuring it out. Pour out a half cup of cereal so that you get a picture of how it looks in relation to the size of the bowl. This will help you estimate the number of servings you typically eat at one time and help you keep track of the total number of servings you eat daily.

Building a healthy meal can be easy. Aim to include foods from three to four of the four Food Groups at each meal; this way you will be eating foods that give you a wide variety of nutrients. A good idea is to try and fill half of your plate with vegetables and fruit, a quarter of your plate with meat or meat alternatives and one

quarter with grain products. If you include milk products throughout the day you are sure to meet the recommended servings for all four Food Groups.

Restaurant rules

Eating out can present more of a challenge. When trying to go easy on portion sizes, ask for half servings, an appetizer or child-size portion where available. Choose items that are baked, broiled, poached, steamed or grilled to avoid hidden fats.

Aiming for a balanced diet by eating a variety of foods and building healthy meals and snacks based on Canada's Food Guide servings, at home and while eating out, is key in achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight.

For more information on serving sizes and the difference between a serving and a portion, or for your copy of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, call *Health Connection* or visit www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

Here is an easy way to remember the size of one serving:

- A small fist equals half a cup of cooked rice, pasta, or frozen or canned vegetables or fruits
- A single, 50 g serving of cheese is about the size of two thumbs
- A single, 100 g serving of meat, fish or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards or a computer mouse.



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