

Health MATTERS

March 2007

Play—just for the fun of it

Having fun and being active doesn't have to be expensive.

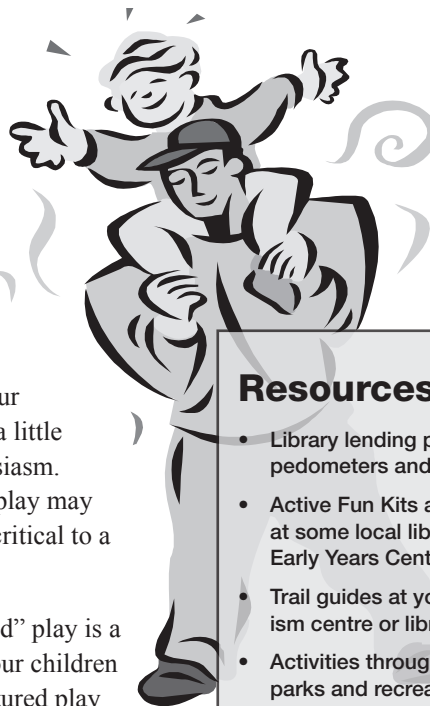
Some of the best times with our children can be enjoyed with a little imagination and lots of enthusiasm. In our busy grown-up world, play may not seem important. But it is critical to a child's development.

Spontaneous and "unstructured" play is a great way for both you and your children to be active together. Unstructured play leaves children to devise their own fun, with whatever toys are on hand. This gives children's imagination free rein, and builds self-confidence and negotiating skills — all the while boosting their physical fitness and helping their coordination.

Parents are important role models for their children. Parents' attitudes towards physical activity and their own levels of physical activity affect how active their children are. Communities also influence children's activity levels. And there is more to your community's role than running sports programs or after-school activities.

Tips for Parents:

- Put on music and dance with your children.
- Build a snowman or snow angels; organize a game of snow tag with the neighbourhood children.



Resources:

- Library lending programs for pedometers and books
- Active Fun Kits available free at some local libraries, Ontario Early Years Centres
- Trail guides at your local tourism centre or library
- Activities through your local parks and recreation department or YMCA.
- Winter Active, www.winteractive.org
- Summer Active, www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/summeractive/index.html
- From the health unit: Canada's Physical Activity Guides for adults, children and youth, *Walk This Way*.



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- Use local playground equipment, public parks and beaches to play.
- Make walking a special family time after dinner. Check out the local trails. Play games like "I spy" and take different routes. Count steps with a pedometer.

Tips for communities:

- Organize after-school activities in your playground or at your local school gym.
- Lobby for supervised park activities, free public skate and swim times.
- Work with local governments and trail groups to develop, maintain, and connect trails in your community, and to create loop trails with destinations to make walking and biking fun.
- Work with local governments to close streets for walking and biking events.
- Organize themed walks along urban trails, i.e. treasure hunts, "jingle bell walks", mayor's walks.
- Ask your workplace to sponsor or host family fun days.

Get involved in your community and speak out for more opportunities for unstructured play for children and families.

Get in on the ACTION!








Hidden risks that could harm baby

What do lead, mercury, tobacco smoke, and pesticides all have in common? They all belong to a group of toxic substances known or suspected to harm the health of children and unborn babies.

Some of these substances have serious and long-term impacts on unborn babies and children. The health concerns include low birth weight, birth defects, asthma, cancer, learning and developmental problems, and hormone and immune system problems.

There are number of reasons why unborn babies and young children are at greater risk for problems if exposed to toxins.










-  In pregnancy, a baby's organs are forming and many toxins easily cross the placenta.
-  As babies and children grow and develop, their organ systems are more vulnerable to the effects of toxins in the environment.
-  Because children are smaller than adults, pound for pound they eat, drink and breathe more than adults.
-  Babies and children often play on the ground and put their hands in their mouths.
-  Because they are young, there is a longer window of opportunity for children to be exposed to toxins and for health problems to appear.

There is also concern about exposure to other toxin-releasing materials—such as some types of molds, plastics, cleaning products and renovation materials—but it's not known what the risks to health are. Some of these materials are likely harmless, unfortunately, there is currently not enough information to establish which are safe and which are not. It's best to be cautious and keep your baby clear of these materials.



So what can we do?

There are actions you can take to protect the health of your child. Use caution with products, even when there is not full scientific proof a substance is harmful.

-  Become educated about what is and may be hazardous. A great place to start would be the environmental resources on the Best Start website at www.beststart.org/resources/env_action/index.html.
-  Read product labels to learn about the product.
-  Be aware of all products in your day-to-day environment—home, work, school, community.
-  Choose non-toxic and least toxic products whenever possible.
-  Find out about any potential hazards before doing house repairs and renovations and be sure that pregnant women, women considering pregnancy and children are not exposed.
-  Be sure that your home has good ventilation.
-  Make your home and car 100% smoke-free.
-  Advocate for businesses and industries to supply and use non-toxic substances.
-  Join groups that are working to create safe and healthy environments. Protecting the health of our environment will make our air, water, soil, food and products safer—and our children as well.

For women planning a pregnancy and for those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, Motherisk can provide valuable information at 1-416-813-6780.

For more information about these issues call Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 or visit the website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.



Violence during pregnancy – more common than you'd think

Pregnancy can be one of the most exciting times in a woman's life. It's filled with anticipation of adding a new family member and watching a baby grow.



It may also surprise parents-to-be to find how much nervousness and apprehension can come with this life-changing event. The excitement can be overshadowed by worries about changing relationships and financial stress and strain. Unfortunately, for one in five women, pregnancy can also be a time of violence and intimate-partner abuse. During pregnancy abuse can start, become much worse or stop completely, only to start again once the baby has arrived.

Violence can affect women of all ages, culture, sexual orientation, education and income level. The Canadian Violence Against Women Survey found that 51 per cent of women over 16 have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual assault and 25 per cent of women have been abused by their intimate partner. Twenty-one per cent of women in Canada who reported abuse said they were abused during pregnancy and 95 per cent of women who were abused in the first trimester of pregnancy were also abused in the three-month period after the baby was born.

Abuse is a way for a partner to try to control a relationship. It always causes harm and it is never the victim's fault. Abuse can come in many forms and isn't always physical. Some examples of different types of abuse are:

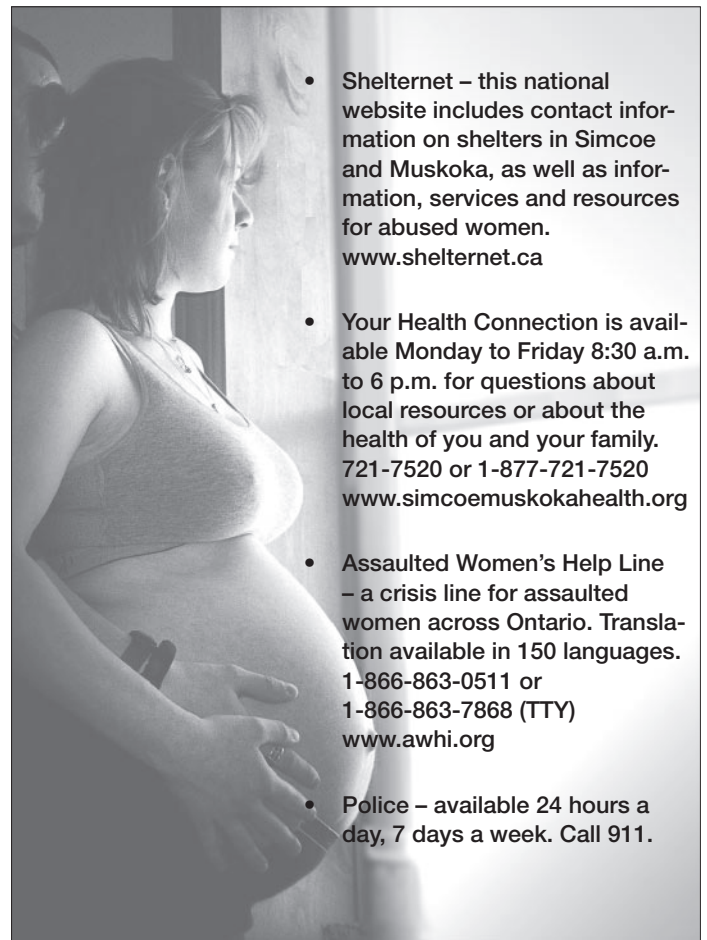
- ✱ **Physical Abuse** – hitting or slapping; using a weapon to threaten or hurt.
- ✱ **Emotional Abuse** – controlling your time, stalking, or isolation from family and friends.
- ✱ **Verbal Abuse** – name calling or humiliation in front of others.
- ✱ **Sexual Abuse** – denying sexual relations, forcing a woman into unwanted sexual acts, unwanted pregnancy or abortion.

- ✱ **Spiritual Abuse** – not allowing a woman to attend her chosen place of worship.
- ✱ **Financial Abuse** – limiting access to family finances or using or abusing a women's credit cards without permission.

There can be shame and fear attached to abuse. Many women are unaware that it is common and will keep abuse a secret. There is help available. If you or someone you know would like more information, need someone to talk to or want information about planning to leave an abusive situation, reach out to resources in your community.



When you need help



- **Shelternet** – this national website includes contact information on shelters in Simcoe and Muskoka, as well as information, services and resources for abused women. www.shelternet.ca
- **Your Health Connection** is available Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. for questions about local resources or about the health of you and your family. 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 www.simcoemuskokahealth.org
- **Assaulted Women's Help Line** – a crisis line for assaulted women across Ontario. Translation available in 150 languages. 1-866-863-0511 or 1-866-863-7868 (TTY) www.awhi.org
- **Police** – available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 911.

Big tobacco dips into the teen market

With the Smoke-Free Ontario Act banning smoking in public places and workplaces in Ontario coupled with steadily decreasing smoking rates, some people are breathing a sigh of relief thinking that the war against tobacco use is almost won.

But the reality is the tobacco industry is not about to fold its multi-million dollar business and fade away. It too has seen the future and has been working to make sure tobacco companies can continue to make profits in an increasingly smoke-free society.

Their newest advertising focus is smokeless tobacco products. Commonly marketed as chew, spit, dip and plug, these products contain more than 3,000 chemicals, including at least 28 that cause cancers. They are not a safe substitute for smoking cigarettes.

Similar to cigarettes, smokeless tobacco is addictive. Holding an average sized dip or chew in the mouth for about 30 minutes produces as much nicotine as three cigarettes.

People who use chew, dip and spit are not only at risk for disfiguring oral cancers, they can also develop permanent gum recession, mouth sores, stomach irritations and ulcers.

Use growing among teens

Statistics on the use of chew and other smokeless products among our youth is limited at present. The 2004-2005 Canadian Youth Smoking Survey of Grade 5 to 9 students shows 2 per cent have used chew tobacco. Among youth 15-19, surveys conducted by Not to Kids, a coalition of 27 public health units identified use of chew tobacco grew from 1.7 per cent in 2003 to 11.6 per cent in 2005 among youth who also smoke cigarettes. Health unit staff are hearing an increasing number of stories of youth using chew tobacco.

Because most types of smokeless tobacco can be used with little detection, parents, teachers, coaches and camp councillors need to educate themselves about smokeless tobacco. Here's a quick overview.

- Chew or spit – loose leaf shredded chew, most commonly sold in a pouch, but it also comes twisted or bricked. A wad is placed between the cheek and the gum. Someone using chew will build up tobacco juice in the mouth and the saliva produced must be spit out. Often youth who are chewing will carry a pop can or cup to spit in.
- Snuff or dip – a fine-grain tobacco that often comes in bags. A pinch is placed between the lower lip and gum. It is also available in small individual sachets/packages that resemble small tea bags and are considered less messy, and may be harder to detect.

The Not to Kids Coalition is responding with a campaign to raise awareness about smokeless tobacco before its use becomes an epidemic. The coalition has developed a graphic education message for free-circulation in high school magazines and has launched a website—www.lostjaw.ca — to give youth the information they need to make healthy choices.

This initiative is designed to counter tobacco industry marketing that is targeting youth by trying to entice them to try their “cool” brands and “fun” flavours including green apple, cherry, berry, peach, vanilla, wintergreen and spearmint. These ads are showing up in magazines geared to young males.

For more information about smokeless tobacco, check out these links:

- www.thephakz.ca
- www.tobacco.aadac.com
- www.cdc.gov/tobacco/factsheets

