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Your Health Connection



Health MATTERS

November 2007

Errands can be good for your health

Do you know that where you live affects your health? The municipal government shapes the environment in which you live, deciding how land is used and how you will move within it.

For example, a council can make decisions about the creation of bike lanes and a well organized system of sidewalks and trails which promote safe walking and biking instead of driving. People and their environment would be healthier if communities were planned this way.

In Canada, over half of automobile trips are under five kilometres – ideal distances to cover by walking or cycling. Any form of human-powered non-motorized transportation, such as walking, cycling or wheeling, is known as “active transportation”.

Active communities are healthy communities

A municipality is a healthier place to live when active transportation is made a priority. Citizens find it easy to move around through their own physical means thereby enhancing health, increasing opportunities for socialization, reducing environmental impacts and reducing the potential for motor vehicle accidents. Active transportation may even lead to reduced crime rates and foster a greater sense of security within the community – thanks to an increased presence of “eyes” on the street.

Go for Green, a national foundation, reports that 82 per cent of Canadians support government spending to establish more bicycle lanes and paths in their community. Imagine how much easier it would be if you could fit the recommended 30 to 60 minutes of

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physical activity into your day just by going about your regular routine. Every little bit counts: shopping, banking, and taking the kids to school could be just around the corner. And you wouldn't need a car to do it.

Experts agree physical activity helps prolong good health and independence by reducing chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Approximately 44 per cent of adults living in Simcoe and Muskoka are inactive; a study of Grade

1 children in Simcoe showed they are not active enough to stimulate healthy growth and development. But good health is more than being free of illness. It's also about feeling good, both mentally and physically, and being able to make healthy choices wherever you are in your community.

Our local municipalities show responsible leadership when they create and maintain sidewalks, trails and walkways that make safe and efficient pedestrian movement easy. It's also important to ensure developers design communities to reduce the distances people have to travel. Good health starts with each person, but it takes a community to support it.

Be aware that the way your community is designed will affect your health. Speak out to ensure your local elected officials know you need a community that makes it easy for you to be active as part of your regular daily life. And be involved by making choices that promote active transportation and healthy living. Do it for yourself and for the health of your community.

Find out more about active transportation and ways to improve health by calling Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 or by visiting www.simcoemuskokahealth.org



Avoid spreading germs at work

A simple handshake is a friendly gesture to a client, colleague or business associate – but it's also an invitation to germs. In fact, hands spread an estimated 80 per cent of common infectious diseases like the cold and flu.

Think about the things you do at work each day that bring you into contact with germs: going to the washroom, using your computer keyboard or mouse, picking up the telephone, or handling money or food. The list is endless and so are the ways you can pick up and pass along bacteria and viruses that can make us sick.

The office or workplace is often a place where several people share a common work area, and where interaction with others takes place frequently. These conditions can increase your chances of being exposed to someone who is sick with a cold or the flu, which can increase the likelihood of you becoming ill.

Handwashing is the best way to prevent illness. It's not new, but it works because it removes dirt and germs before they can find their way into our bodies.

Brush up on your scrubbing technique!

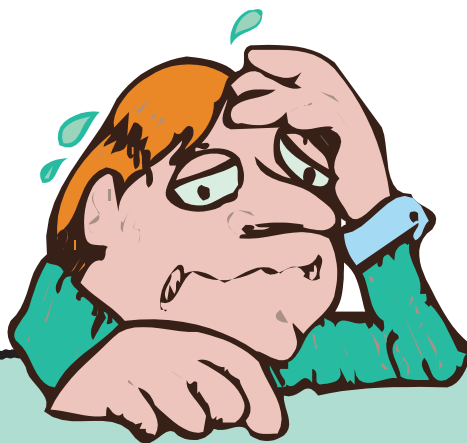
To make sure you are washing your hands properly, use soap and warm water. Wet your hands. Add soap and rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 seconds. Rinse hands and dry with a clean towel, then turn off the tap with the towel. Alcohol-based gels and sanitizers (minimum 60 per cent alcohol) are also an option, but should only be used when your hands are not visibly soiled or dirty.

When you cough or sneeze, be sure to cover up! Viruses that live in the nose, throat and lungs can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes onto surfaces or people around them. Always cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, away from people. It's wise to wash your hands after sneezing or coughing.

Regularly disinfect shared surfaces at work. Objects like telephones, keyboards, pens and desks can harbour germs. If you work with children give them hard surface toys to play with; they can be more easily cleaned and disinfected. (Cleaning with soap removes surface dirt and grime but disinfecting is needed to kill the germs.) Avoid eating at your desk, as crumbs and spilled food is a favourite place for germs to collect.

Stay home from work if you have cold or flu symptoms such as fever, runny nose, dry cough, tiredness and muscle aches. Being at home means you won't spread your illness to your coworkers, clients or others you may come in contact with.

One other action you can take to protect yourself and those around you is to get a flu shot. Each year, thousands of Ontarians fall ill with the flu, which can be spread to others with just one sneeze. If you live, work or attend school in Ontario, it's free.



What can a workplace do to stop the spread of germs?

- have an infection control plan
- provide clean handwashing facilities and post handwashing reminders
- offer alcohol-based hand sanitizers when regular facilities are not available (or to people on the road)
- provide boxes of tissues
- remind staff to not share cups, glasses, dishes and cutlery. Be sure dishes are washed in soap and water after use.
- remove magazines and papers from waiting areas or common rooms
- consider cleaning a person's workstation or other areas where they have been if a person has suspected or identified influenza
- make sure ventilation systems are working properly.



Family-Friendly is more than a slogan

Family-friendly hotels, vacations, community events, workplaces and restaurants: one doesn't have to look far to find places or events labelled "family-friendly".

What exactly does family friendly mean? A family-friendly place or event is a place where deliberate plans of action are put into place that support and protect families. In today's complex and very busy world, supportive communities that provide family-friendly places and events are welcomed and necessary to grow the healthiest children possible.

Communities take on a significant role in helping families raise children by taking action on family-friendly plans. Father-friendly and breastfeeding-friendly places or events are two local examples of actions that are growing in popularity.

Father-Friendly Places

Father-friendly places encourage the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. Fathers are important to the healthy development of children. A 2002 study at the University of Guelph found children who feel closer to their father feel better about themselves. They are also able to build trusting relationships with others; are more likely to succeed in school; have fewer behavioural problems; have more opportunities to experience success; and are more ready to learn.



A father-friendly place makes an effort to be comfortable for fathers. For example, a parenting centre could offer a wider choice of magazines or select different wall colours. Every effort is made to include fathers in all activities or events. Contact information for both father and mother are collected. Questions about children are directed to the father and mother. Something as simple as having change tables in men's washrooms or family change rooms helps include fathers more in the lives of their children.

Dads, like moms, will seek out places where they can be actively involved with the lives of their children. When dads are involved everybody wins: children, families and communities.

Breastfeeding-Friendly Places

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed until six months of age, with the introduction of nutrient-rich solid foods at that time, and continued breastfeeding up to two years and beyond. In Muskoka and Simcoe more than 4,300 babies are born each year.



Recent statistics reveal that about 90 per cent of women start breastfeeding their babies at birth, and about half are still breastfeeding at six months.

Parents are more likely to frequent public places where breastfeeding is welcome. Workplaces, shopping malls, restaurants and community events that support families to breastfeed their babies may be referred to as breastfeeding-friendly places. There are hundreds of businesses in our communities that have identified themselves as being breastfeeding-friendly, and many more are interested in finding out what they can do to support families to breastfeed their babies with comfort and confidence. They recognize that supporting breastfeeding is not only good for mothers and babies, it's good for business!

Breastfeeding-friendly places and events provide a welcoming atmosphere for breastfeeding families. Baby-friendly posters and stickers are displayed in public areas. A private area to breastfeed may be provided on request. A breastfeeding-friendly place also ensures that pregnant women and new families can focus on breastfeeding rather than feeling pressured by the presence of advertising from companies that sell formula and infant feeding supplies "just in case".

Communities can put family-friendly plans into action to support families. For more information about how to make your community event or place more family-friendly call Your Health Connection 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.



Look Mom - no cavities!

Almost 20 per cent of children will have cavities by the time they start school. This type of decay is called early childhood tooth decay.

Although parents may not feel this is a concern because baby teeth are soon replaced, back teeth – the molars – are important for proper alignment of the permanent teeth. Teeth at any age are needed to eat nutritious foods, to form sounds in talking, and to present a happy smile to family and friends.

Tooth decay is not pleasant

No parent wants to see their child suffer with toothaches or go through extensive dental treatment under anaesthetic or in hospital. Children treated for early childhood tooth decay will often need additional treatment within six months to a year. There's also a greater risk for cavities in permanent teeth.



How do I know if my child is at risk for cavities?

Check the following list to see what can be done to protect your child's dental health.

Brush for your child two times each day

Parents should start by cleaning the child's gums and, later, teeth. Parents should do the brushing until the child can properly manage a brush on their own. Usually when a child can eat using a knife and fork, they can also manage a toothbrush. Brush twice a day, morning and night.

Use fluoride toothpaste

A little fluoride every day effectively helps prevent cavities. For people without fluoride in their drinking water, fluoridated toothpaste is important. Begin with a tiny smear of toothpaste and no more than a pea-sized amount when the child is able to spit.

Don't rinse – this keeps the fluoride active on the tooth enamel for longer. It's important to dispense the toothpaste for a child and supervise its use.

Treat cavities in parents or siblings

Untreated cavities produce cavity-causing bacteria in the mouth. These bacteria can be passed to infants through saliva. Risks of cavities increase when other family members have tooth decay.

Avoid falling to sleep at night while feeding

If a child over 7 months old falls to sleep with milk still pooled around the teeth, this will weaken the tooth enamel. After feeding, the child needs to swallow all the liquid, and then the parent should quickly wipe the teeth and gums with a clean, damp facecloth.

Restrict drinking sweet beverages or milk to meals and snack time

Frequent sipping on anything other than water will raise the acid level in the mouth and weaken the teeth. Juice, sweetened beverages and milk should be restricted to meal and snack time. For the rest of the day, stick to water.

Limit frequent sweet or sticky snacks

Regularly eating foods high in sugars that may stick to the teeth for a long time will contribute to decay. A better choice is foods that fit into Canada's Food Guide. Choose fruits and vegetables more often.

Your child should start visiting a dental care provider after their first birthday.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit dental team can answer any of your dental questions or provide dental screening for your child. Call Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.

