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DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

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*Your Health Connection*



# Health MATTERS

November 2012

## Smokeless doesn't mean harmless Chew tobacco gnaws at teens' health

*With about 18 per cent of Canadian youth smoking, it would appear that most teens and young adults know to steer clear of cigarette smoking.*

But those statistics act as a smokescreen for the growing use of smokeless tobacco products like chew and dip.

In the 2010 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, about eight per cent of Canadians 15 and older reported trying smokeless tobacco products, including about 119,000 kids 15 to 19 and 228,000 between the ages of 20 and 24.

Even more alarming are the stories told by local hockey coaches and parents about entire teams using chew tobacco on a regular basis. They've heard the myth that somehow it improves performance.

If you talk to a high school student you will likely hear that there are students who not only use chew tobacco but carry their pop can into classes so they have somewhere to spit when they are chewing during class.

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So why has this type of tobacco product become so popular? For one thing, it allows users to chew tobacco in public places where smoking is now prohibited.

For tobacco companies, it makes good business sense to put resources into marketing new smokeless tobacco products. They can retain and gain new customers to become addicted to their deadly merchandise.

A whole range of smokeless tobacco products now on the market offer fruity, chocolate or vanilla flavouring to make them appealing to new, often young users.

### Smokeless tobacco 101

**Chew or Spit:** loose-leaf shredded tobacco that is mixed with an abrasive like fiberglass that is placed between the cheek and the gum. The abrasives cut the cheek, gums and lips to allow the nicotine to get into the bloodstream faster.

**Snuff or Dip:** a fine-grain tobacco that often comes in bags. A pinch is placed between the lower lip and gum. Along with the youth-friendly flavours, many products have deceptive packaging that makes them look more like gum or candy than cancer-causing, addictive products.



#### What to look for

Watch for these clues that someone is using smokeless tobacco:

- Look like they are chewing gum often.
- Carrying and spitting into a pop can or cup.
- Regularly spending money with nothing to show for it.
- Increasing the use of lip balm.
- Complaints of cracked, bleeding lips or white spots or sores in the mouth.

#### What to say

You can help teens make smart choices by reinforcing that:

- Smokeless is not harmless: It causes mouth, tongue and other cancers.
- Any tobacco use will harm, not help, sports performance.
- Chew and dip are addictive, just like other tobacco products.
- It's easy to start and difficult to quit tobacco – but you can quit!

# Food charters take root

*The food system touches everyone, from farmers to politicians to hospital administrators, restaurant owners, local service clubs, food banks, families – and you.*

Consider the possible impact on you and your community of even one of the following situations:

- ◆ disappearing farmland ,
- ◆ dependence on far-away food sources where a crop failure could hike food prices out of reach,
- ◆ having to choose between paying rent or putting food on the table,
- ◆ because of low income, being unable to afford healthier food options,
- ◆ needing to drive for miles to the nearest grocery store.

These are common issues for many in Simcoe and Muskoka. They can be changed, though, with effort from the whole community. Many places have found that a food charter can be of great help in addressing food system issues.

Simply put, a food system is all the steps needed to get food from field to market to table and taking care of food waste.

## What is a food charter?

A food charter outlines a community’s values, beliefs and priorities about food and the local food system. Everyone from the top down and the bottom up has a chance to take part in creating it. Once developed and endorsed by the community and key decision-makers in local government, agriculture, health and other sectors, a charter is a powerful tool for shaping local policies, programs and even personal decisions about food and the food system.

## How would it work?

Let’s say one of the priorities in a region’s charter is “equal access to safe and healthy food for all.” If this priority is kept in mind when local decisions are made it could lead to changes such as ...

- ◆ more grocery stores in neighbourhoods and communities that lack healthy food retailers,
- ◆ after-school programs that give kids a chance to learn and practise cooking and other food skills,

- ◆ healthy foods – including locally grown items – on school, day care, college and other menus,
- ◆ sustainable funding for community food programs like the Good Food Box/Fresh Food Basket that bring healthy foods close to everyone.

Over the last year input from the public and key decision-makers has led to a draft Simcoe County Food and Agriculture Charter which will be released early in 2013. Muskoka is also developing a food charter.



**Can you buy healthful foods?**

- An average family of four living on Ontario Works in Simcoe or Muskoka would spend up to 91% of their income just for food and rent, leaving only \$10.39 per person per week for other expenses. (For details of the 2012 Nutritious Food Basket survey go to: [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/FoodBasket](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/FoodBasket).)
- Some communities in Simcoe and Muskoka have many grocery stores close to home. Others have none, leaving convenience stores as the only option.
- 204 variety and fast food stores are within walking distance of schools in Simcoe and Muskoka.

To find out more about where things are at with charter development in your area and how you can get involved contact:

Simcoe County Food & Agriculture Charter, on the Food Partners Alliance website: [www.fpa.simcoe.ca](http://www.fpa.simcoe.ca).

Muskoka Food Charter contact: [admin@savourmuskoka.com](mailto:admin@savourmuskoka.com).



# You are your own best regulator

*Ever have one of those days when you had trouble keeping it together? Have you ever watched someone else “lose it”?*

People manage their emotions and reactions every day. Some seem better at it than others. We now know that our ability to do this starts very early in life.

The scientific name for the ability to manage emotions and reactions is “self-regulation”. It’s what makes us get along with others and roll with what life hands us. People with good self-regulation are resilient, flexible and adaptable. A person with poor self-regulation may have trouble with change and challenges or react in self-destructive ways.

## Our basic wiring

It’s more than just a matter of breathing deep and counting to ten. A number of important things shape our coping skills. Each of us has a unique basic temperament. It’s how we are wired from birth. What research now shows is that parents can help children manage this temperament and promote even better “wiring” to increase self-regulation.

## Managing the wiring

Self-management, a big part of self-regulation, is our ability to look at what’s happening, choose a way to respond, evaluate how our choice worked and try something new if necessary.

Here’s a stressful moment that calls for a measured response: Your baby is crying and you don’t know why. Try to:

- ◆ respond with love,
- ◆ hold baby next to your skin (feeling and smelling the skin of a mom or dad promotes a comforting neural response),
- ◆ quietly talk to reassure her,
- ◆ feed or rock her and note what calmed her,
- ◆ think of the early clues the baby showed before she cried, so you can respond earlier next time.

Each time you do this, you help shape the infant’s developing brain. A calm response teaches them that pain, hunger and fear are not permanent. They learn to deal with challenges calmly and will keep that ability into adulthood.



## Instilling confidence

Along with managing our feelings and reactions, we also need to have confidence and believe that what we do makes a difference.

You know how tough it can be to take a suggestion to your boss. But if you believe in your case, you’ll be more relaxed. Your confidence will be greater for challenges to come, too.

If you are the parent of a teen, you know that their confidence in relationships or school can be shaky. A son or daughter showing a change in mood, or becoming withdrawn may need a chance to talk. As a parent, your strength is being watchful for changes and opening a conversation. Try to:

- ◆ avoid placing blame,
- ◆ help them discover how they can believe in themselves,
- ◆ guide them so they can learn the skills of honest self-evaluation and living with the choices they make.

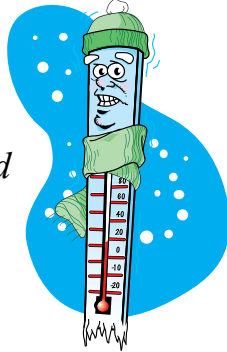
Without that support, isolation, negative feelings and unhealthy behaviour can creep into their lives.

Adults can learn or improve their skills with self-regulation through peer support and counseling. Parenting education opportunities can help parents learn the skills they need to teach their children how to cope with life’s challenges.



# Now is the discontent of our winter

*Winter brings unpredictable weather, extreme cold and the common cold! Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy this coming season.*



## Flu vaccine—the earlier the better!

The flu vaccine is still the single most effective way to prevent catching the flu – and from spreading it to others. It's best to get the vaccine in the fall before the flu appears in the community. However, it's not too late in December or even January. Flu season usually starts around the holidays and can run as late as May. Health units keep vaccine supplies well into spring.

So if you miss the fall clinics, call your health care provider or the health unit to book an appointment.

## Infection Control

The fall and winter months bring sniffing and sneezing caused by the common cold or the flu. There are some easy steps to help protect yourself, your family and community from the spread of infections:

- ◆ wash your hands with either soap and water or hand sanitizer,
- ◆ cover up when you cough or sneeze with a tissue or the inside of your elbow,
- ◆ clean shared surfaces often,
- ◆ stay home if you're sick.

## Extreme cold

Exposure to cold temperatures can cause serious or life-threatening health problems. To keep yourself and your family safe from injury from cold:

- ◆ cover exposed skin, wear a hat and wear clothes in layers,
- ◆ keep children indoors if the temperature falls below -25°C, or if the wind chill is -28°C or colder,
- ◆ drink warm beverages; avoid alcohol and caffeine,
- ◆ take shelter from the wind and keeping moving.

Symptoms of frostbite or hypothermia include pale grey skin, numbness and localized pain, shivering, confusion and weakness. Seek medical help immediately.

## Falls

You can prevent falls.

Anyone can fall and the first step to avoiding falls is to understand what causes them. Poor balance and footwear, decreased muscle and bone strength, reduced vision or hearing, and unsafe conditions such as black ice can increase your chances of falling.

Prevent falls by:

- ◆ checking on lighting in stairways and outside paths, removing tripping hazards such as rugs, and decluttering high traffic areas,
- ◆ eating well and staying active,
- ◆ using whatever devices in your daily life—canes, handrails, shoes with good treads—will keep you safe.

Look for more tips under Injury Prevention in the health unit's website. Your independence and well-being are at stake. Take action!

## Idling

The pollutants in car exhaust are part of air pollution and climate change. They can also cause or worsen lung infections and irritation, asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, heart disease and can increase the risk of cancers.

Instead of idling:

- ◆ use a block heater on a timer set for two hours before you drive away,
- ◆ avoid using drive-throughs; park, turn off your car and walk inside,
- ◆ avoid remote control car starters—they encourage longer idling times,
- ◆ warm up your car by driving it; today's engines are designed to warm up quickly as you drive.

By reducing unnecessary idling you can cut pollutants, and improve air quality and the health of our residents.

