

# Health MATTERS

September 2006

## A healthy town — you can make it happen

*Healthy communities have a unique sense of character and vibrancy.*

Imagine living in a place where individuals, families and groups enjoy optimal health. Imagine a community designed to make healthy lifestyle choices easy and accessible. Imagine working together to create the healthiest community possible.

Most people think health is a personal responsibility. However, there is growing recognition that a community's design can influence the health of the public. Collective action is needed in homes, schools, workplaces, community settings and health settings to make healthy communities a reality.



### How to make it happen

Your town or city hall has a role to play in shaping a healthy community. A community's social, economic, natural and physical environments all have an impact on people's health and quality of life. The challenge is to understand how these factors affect people's health. With that knowledge, people then can work with governments and community groups to build healthier neighbourhoods.

People living in a poorly designed community may have to contend with poor air quality, lack of space for physical activity and inadequate food choices. These are factors that can contribute to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, asthma and obesity. On the other hand, a community with well designed sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, playgrounds and recreation centres will help individuals stay healthy. It is also easier to make healthy choices when there are healthy foods available in recreation centres, community programs and restaurants.

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### How you can get in on the action

#### *Be aware*

- Learn about ways to be physically active in your community.
- Find restaurants that offer healthy food choices.
- Learn how you can influence physical activity and healthy eating options in your community.

#### *Make it easy*

- Take advantage of physical activity opportunities in your community.
- Use parks, walking and bike paths and sports fields.
- Dine in restaurants that serve healthy food choices.

#### *Be involved*

- Get involved in groups and clubs interested in physical activity and healthy eating – including trails committees, community kitchens and Good Food Box programs.
- Start a walking club, coach a team, lead a scout or guide group, or help organize active community events.
- Promote healthy food choices at community programs and events.

#### *Speak out*

- Join local groups to provide a strong voice for healthy community changes.
- Call or write local politicians and attend public meetings to support them in important decisions that promote health.
- Support municipal plans that have safe walking and biking lanes to schools, housing, shopping and parks.

A healthy community is one that helps residents of all ages adopt healthy lifestyles. Everyone can help make it happen. Get in on the action!



# Fluoride—your best bet against tooth decay!

*Fluoride reduces dental cavities and slows or reverses the progress of existing small cavities.*

## What is tooth decay?

Tooth decay happens when the tooth enamel has been dissolved by acid, forming a defect or hole — better known as a cavity. Bacteria in dental plaque produce the acids when they mix with sugars from food and drinks.

## How does fluoride work to prevent tooth decay?

- ✓. promotes repair of tooth enamel weakened by acids;
- ✓. makes teeth more resistant to breakdown from acids;
- ✓. stops the bacteria in the mouth from producing acids that cause tooth decay.

## Daily use of fluoride

Fluoride works best when small amounts of fluoride stay in the mouth in saliva and dental plaque. Small amounts of fluoride each day reduces the risk of tooth decay in all age groups, not just for children.

## Is there fluoride in our drinking water?

Tottenham, Canadian Forces Base Borden, Huntsville and Bracebridge are the only communities in Simcoe and Muskoka with fluoride added to the water supply. We know that the decay rates in Simcoe County are double those in Peel Region, which has fluoridated water.

The use of fluoride toothpaste is the only fluoride source for most of our residents. Studies show that decay rates can be reduced by 15 to 30 per cent with use of fluoride toothpaste.

## Proper use of fluoride

- ✓. **Start cleaning teeth early** – As soon as the first tooth appears, begin cleaning by wiping with a clean damp cloth or a small, soft toothbrush. Use a small smear of fluoride toothpaste twice a day, particularly at bedtime.



- ✓. **Use the right amount of fluoride toothpaste** – If children under 6 years swallow too much fluoride, their adult teeth may come in with white spots (fluorosis). Children under 3 years should have their teeth brushed by an adult using only a smear of toothpaste. Children under 6 years should use only a small, pea-sized amount of toothpaste. Your child should spit during and after brushing.

- ✓. **Keep toothpaste out of reach of small children** – Flavours in toothpaste that appeal to children encourage them to brush, but may also cause young children to eat toothpaste. This is suspected to be one of the major causes of fluorosis.

- ✓. **Spit but do not rinse** – Educate your child to spit out the excess saliva and toothpaste but do not rinse with water. The small amount of fluoride that remains in the mouth works to prevent tooth decay.

- ✓. **Supervise tooth brushing** – Parents should brush their child's teeth twice a day until they have the skill to handle the brush alone. Continue to supervise your child to be sure they are doing a thorough job, using the right amount of toothpaste, spitting, and brushing twice a day for two minutes each time.

- ✓. **Talk to your dentist** – If your child is at higher risk for tooth decay, the dentist may recommend fluoride rinses or gels at home, fluoride treatments in the dental office, or chewable vitamins containing fluoride.

## Not just for kids

Fluoride also benefits teens, adults and seniors, decreasing the risk of tooth decay on the tooth crown and root surface. Additional fluoride products could help people who have braces; have had cancer therapy of the head and neck; use medications that decrease saliva flow; have high rates of decay; or have crowns or bridge work.

Daily use of fluoride in toothpaste and other products recommended by the dentist will help people maintain good oral health.



# Vitamin D – The sunshine vitamin

## Too much or not enough?

Many people believe sun exposure is good for their health. The medical community has been debating this view recently. The experts now agree: sitting in the sun is good *and* bad for your health. Sunlight creates vitamin D in your body, offering many health benefits. However, direct sun exposure is also linked to skin cancer.

## Vitamin D basics

Vitamin D is usually linked to the health of bones. This vitamin helps us absorb calcium from what we eat and drink. A lack of vitamin D in children's early years puts them at greater risk for developing rickets, a softening and weakening of the bones' structure. Low levels of vitamin D have also been linked to osteoporosis, fractures in the elderly, and some types of cancer.

## So, how much do I need?

The amount of vitamin D currently recommended per day ranges between 200 and 600 IU, depending on age, with older adults requiring higher amounts. While babies are being exclusively breastfed, they need a vitamin D supplement of 400 IU daily.

## Where to find vitamin D?

People get their vitamin D from three sources: the sun, the food we eat and through supplements.

Your body can produce enough vitamin D to meet its needs just through regular, brief exposure to the sun's ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. However, ultraviolet light can lead to skin cancer and cataracts. The Canadian Cancer Society advises people to use sunscreens. However sunscreens completely block vitamin D production in the skin. As a result, we may need to look for other sources of vitamin D.

Vitamin D is found in a few foods we eat. It either occurs naturally or in artificially fortified foods. Fatty fish contains significant amounts of vitamin D. In Canada, only milk and margarine must be fortified with vitamin D. Other food products may contain additional vitamin D, so always check the Nutrition Facts label. Unfortunately, research shows many Canadians do not meet their need for vitamin D from food alone.










Food/Drink	Portion Size	Vitamin D content*
Milk	1 cup (250 mL)	110 IU
Skim milk powder	½ cup (125 mL)	160 IU
Soy beverage or orange juice, if vitamin D-fortified	1 cup (250 mL)	90 IU
Margarine	1 teaspoon (5 g)	25 IU
Mackerel, trout, tuna, sardines	3 oz (100 g)	100-300 IU
Salmon, whitefish	3 oz (100 g)	300-600 IU

\*Canadian Nutrient File, 2005.  
(IU = International Units; a common measurement for vitamins.)




So, if we don't eat enough of the right things or get enough sun exposure, how do we get enough vitamin D? If you are concerned about your vitamin D levels, discuss supplementation with your health care provider.

## Those at risk:

You may be at risk for low levels of vitamin D if you:

-  Are confined or work indoors
-  Live in Canada or the northern USA
-  Do not use milk or margarine
-  Regularly wear clothing that covers most of the skin
-  Live in a highly polluted area
-  Are conscientiously using sunscreen
-  Have dark skin pigmentation

There is currently no clear answer as to how we can achieve an ideal amount of vitamin D while limiting our sun exposure to decrease our risk of developing skin cancer. For now, we should keep the following messages in mind:

-  Sun protection is required when the UV index is 3 or higher.
-  Brief, unprotected exposure to the sun and daily inclusion of vitamin D rich foods as part of a healthy diet is important for all children and adults.
-  More research is needed to determine the optimal amount of vitamin D supplementation required to prevent health problems.



# There is no magic potion for athletic excellence

*A lot of advertising takes aim directly at youth, selling products with the claim – implied or direct – that they will improve performance in athletics and physical activity.*

## Smokeless tobacco

Chew or snuff tobacco products are often deliberately flavoured and sweetened to make them appealing to younger palates. Youth may have heard the myths that chew/snuff tobacco can improve athletic performance. Nicotine in the tobacco product may give the feeling of a rush, which may be interpreted by youth as a “performance burst”. The truth is, it is still tobacco and is not safe. It will not enhance athletic performance and will more likely hinder it.

- ◆ It is addictive, just like cigarettes. Chewing an average amount for 30 minutes is like smoking four cigarettes.
- ◆ It causes cancer of the mouth and throat, gum disease, permanent loss of gum tissue and bone support of teeth, and stomach ulcers.
- ◆ Nicotine from chewing tobacco causes narrowing of the blood vessels, making it more difficult for the heart to get oxygen to the body.

As parents, we can listen carefully to our youth and ask them their thoughts about these products. Give them the straight facts. Speak out about its use to coaches and teachers. Encourage local teams to ban their use on the team. Encourage adults who work with youth to openly discuss the real risks associated with any type of tobacco.

If someone you care about uses chew/snuff tobacco products, talk to them. Encourage them to see a doctor or dentist, who can examine their mouth for health problems caused by use. Your Health Connection at 1-877-721-7520 can help plan for quitting and suggest resources and strategies for their game plan.



## Sport and Energy drinks

When our youth are working hard in a sport, they need lots of fluids for their health and athletic performance. It is important to replace fluids lost through sweating during physical activity in order to prevent dehydration, as dehydration can impair performance.

Sport drinks are specially designed to replace fluid and electrolytes lost through intense physical activity. Cool water is essential, and more appropriate than sports drinks for physical activity lasting less

than 90 minutes. Sports drinks may be appropriate for intense physical activity lasting longer than 90 minutes, to replace electrolytes lost during sweating and to provide some carbohydrates to sustain energy levels. Diluted 100% fruit juice (one part juice, one part water) is a great alternative to sports drinks, providing appropriate fluids, electrolytes and carbohydrates. It is important to limit sports drink consumption to only those times when electrolyte and energy levels are a concern.

“Energy drinks” are often mistaken for sports drinks. They usually contain a high amount of caffeine. People think energy drinks give them a boost during intense physical activity, or are good thirst quenchers. But these drinks may actually lead to dehydration. This not only decreases performance, but is also dangerous. You should discourage children from using these drinks. Adults should not consume more than 500mL per day.

Similar to soft drinks, regular use of sport drinks may contribute to dental cavities and enamel damage. More and more young people are consuming sport drinks daily, rather than more beneficial beverages such as water, milk, or 100% fruit juice. There is no substitute for water. Be sure to pack water bottles for before, during and after exercise and perhaps pieces of fruit like orange slices to keep our youth hydrated and energized the healthy way!

There are a lot of misconceptions about youth-targeted products. Youth need to know how to sort fact from fantasy in ads. As parents and coaches we can support them by helping them develop their game plan.



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