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DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

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Your Health Connection



Health MATTERS

September 2011

Cooking for a mob?

It doesn't take much to turn a happy picnic gathering into a very unhappy, ill group of people.

Just let the sandwiches sit out in the sun unrefrigerated for a while before eating them. Or store the watermelon slices below the uncooked burger patties in the cooler. Or use the same plate for carrying your raw steaks to the grill that you use later for serving your finished meal.

All those situations can cause food poisoning or food-borne illness resulting from a variety of bacteria, parasites or viruses that multiply in poorly handled food.

Thankfully, preventing food poisoning is a fairly simple business.

Food is often a highlight at community-based special events any time of year. The health unit can advise organizers on proper preparation, handling and serving of foods to ensure there are no unwanted outcomes.

It is important that organizers of community events contact their local health unit beforehand to discuss event-specific food safety tips. Depending on the nature of the event, organizers may be required to go through an application process for special event approval from the health unit.

Special event approval may involve inspection on the day of the event and questions regarding

- ◆ sources of foods being served,
- ◆ how the food is being cooked and handled and
- ◆ how experienced or trained the staff or volunteers are in making foods on a large scale for such an event.

Additional information regarding community special events and application forms for health unit approval are available on the health unit's website, or by calling Your Health Connection and speaking to a public health inspector directly.

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Four simple rules

The rules can be simplified down to four basics that are easy to remember:

- ◆ **Clean** – Bring the tools needed to keep food preparation surfaces, dishes, utensils and hands clean. Know when to wash your hands (before and after). Do not volunteer to help out or work in the kitchen if you are or have been sick... keep pets away from food areas... tie back your hair... make sure there are enough garbage bins in the area.
- ◆ **Separate** – Keep ready-to-eat food away from raw meats by using separate containers. Keep utensils used for one or the other separate, too. Use separate cutting boards or sanitize them after cutting raw meats.
- ◆ **Cook** – Know the temperatures needed to get foods out of the danger zone where bacteria can grow.
- ◆ **Chill** – Keeping foods at 4° C or lower slows the growth of bacteria.



Got questions about any of the features in Health Matters? Other concerns? Call Your Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You'll also see related information at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.



We just need to move more

There are lots of reasons we all need to be more active – whether it is for our health or for the environment.

Research is showing that many people are sedentary or “non-active” most waking hours of their day. In fact, almost all Canadians young and old are not meeting the new Canadian physical activity guidelines. Screen time is replacing active time and this is becoming a norm that’s creating serious long-term health problems.



How much activity is needed?

The Canadian guidelines recommend that children and youth (5 to 17 years old) need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Currently only seven per cent of children and youth meet that mark. Adults from 18 to 64 need at least 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Only 15 per cent of adults achieve that.

Tips

Start early: Developing physical movement skills (throwing, running, jumping, catching, skipping, hopping) early in life is essential to allow children to continue to be active into their adult years.

Cut the screen time: About 73 per cent of children and youth watch TV, read, or play video and computer games after school between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. They spend up to 40 hours a week in front of a screen – equal to a full-time job! That’s time they could be outside, building relationships with their friends, connecting to their community and getting fit. When children and youth are active after school they tend to be more active throughout the day.

Make family time: As a parent you can turn after-school time into active time by planning a family activity before or after dinner, or even both. Try a bike ride around the neighbourhood together, or a game of Frisbee in the back yard. If the distances are short, encourage your children to walk and bike to school and after-school activities more often. Speak out for affordable or free after-school programs and when at home, turn the screens off. And get active yourself! Your children will follow your lead if they see you are going for walks to the corner store or playing a game of pickup ball with friends.

Take the ‘I Can Walk’ pledge: If you are having a hard time deciding where to start, check out the iCANwalk campaign at www.iCANwalk.ca. The campaign encourages walking, biking, in-line skating or skateboarding as alternatives to traveling by car for short trips. Active transportation is a great way to build activity into your day. You’ll save on transportation costs. You will spare the air. You’ll also be showing the way for your family.

Speak out: Your community’s layout influences whether people can walk or bike safely. Green spaces or parks are a must to allow for active play. Let your community leaders know that you appreciate positive changes such as seeing new trails, bike lanes and sidewalks in areas where you normally drive.

Resources:

- ◆ Canada’s New Physical Activity Guides for all ages (www.csep.ca)
- ◆ iCANwalk – Take the pledge (www.ICANwalk.ca)
- ◆ ParticipACTION – Activity ideas (www.participaction.com)
- ◆ Be Active for Life – Information on physical literacy (www.activeforlife.ca/)



Blogging your way to safe alcohol use

Low-risk drinking guidelines

“...wow, I didn’t know about half of these facts until this contest. Thanks for informing the public in such a creative way.”

“Hi, I am so jazzed I found your webpage. A good read. Thanks for your blog and keep the posts coming.”



People are well aware of the risks of drinking too much alcohol. Far fewer people are aware however, of the low-risk drinking guidelines and health risks of drinking beyond them.

Getting a message to responsible drinkers about safe levels of drinking is not easy. As a topic, low-risk drinking is not hot. Recently the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit ran a campaign combining social media, traditional media and a contest to get the message out in a creative and non-judgmental way. Ads and news releases, coasters and posters, Facebook, Twitter and especially a blog site—howmanydrinks.org—all helped bring the moderation message home.

The Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines

Alcohol, even in moderate amounts, raises the risk of stroke and high blood pressure as well as various types of cancers including: cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon, rectum and breast.

The low-risk drinking guidelines were developed to help Canadians understand what the safer limits are. They recommend no more than two standard drinks on any day. Over a week women should limit themselves to no more than nine standard drinks and men should stay within 14 standard drinks.

Lessons from the blogosphere

Alcohol is absolutely pervasive in our culture. The blog site has revealed how subtly alcohol is incorporated into our lives—much like tobacco once was.

Alcohol is sold commercially in so many different forms that people may be drinking more than they realize. A video blog compared two coolers. One of them was the same size and alcohol content as a beer: a single, standard drink. The other was larger and had higher alcohol content, so two bottles were equal to three standard drinks: over the daily recommended limit.

The blogs explored the hype around the claims that red wines—and even brandy—have antioxidants that can protect against heart disease. Those claims seldom mention that alcohol can cause cancer and the heart protection is only good when less than one standard drink is consumed.

Some marketing efforts can be quite preposterous. For instance, a new vodka has added casein—a protein, so the marketing implied, that would let people maintain their fitness and their nightlife at the same time. Readers were drawn by the lighthearted approach to the campaign. One contest winner said the blogs were informative and not “preachy.”

If you’d like to join the discussion and learn more about the low-risk drinking guidelines, you can start on Twitter, and search for SMDhealthunit. The blog site is www.howmanydrinks.org. And on Facebook you can look for How Many Drinks.



Babies don't come with an instruction manual

Wouldn't it be great if babies really DID come with a manual? "To stop crying, press button A."



It doesn't work that way, though, and many parents-to-be have questions about what life will be like with their new baby. There are many sources of information on pregnancy and early parenting, and it can be hard to figure out which ones you can trust.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit offers current and accurate information in an easy-to-find A-to-Z list, available on our website under the Parents and Parents-to-be Section. You can scan or search through the list for virtually everything from air quality to thumb sucking, and everything in between including bonding and breastfeeding, colic, child development stages, nutrition, sleeping (or lack of it), tooth care, vaccines and more website choices for good information.

We also offer the Getting Ready for Baby prenatal classes: they're a chance to learn up-to-date information and connect with other parents-to-be. This free series of classes is taught by public health nurses and is offered in your community in the evenings or on Saturdays. These classes are attended by parents-to-be in the last three months of their pregnancy. Register early in your pregnancy as classes may fill quickly.

At Getting Ready for Baby classes some of the topics you will learn about are:

- ◆ caring for your baby,
- ◆ keeping your baby safe,
- ◆ feeding your baby,
- ◆ becoming a parent,
- ◆ what life will be like with baby in the first few weeks.

You can attend Getting Ready for Baby classes in Alcona, Alliston, Barrie, Bracebridge, Bradford, Collingwood, Cookstown, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Midland and Orillia. For additional information, to register, or to speak with a public health professional, call Your Health Connection.

You're not alone

Parents-to-be often find it encouraging to know that they are not alone when it comes to their questions and concerns about becoming parents. The information learned and the connections made in prenatal classes are supportive and lasting.

There are many other Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit resources available to help you prepare for your new, exciting and rewarding role as a parent.

- ◆ Your Health Connection – The Health Unit's telephone hotline offers you the opportunity to speak with a public health professional to get answers to your questions. Call weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or contact us on-line.
- ◆ "Having a Baby" resource sheet – A directory of contact information for local programs and services in your community related to pregnancy and parenting. Available on-line or from Your Health Connection.
- ◆ Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program – This program offers support from a public health nurse and family home visitor for pregnant moms and parents with children ages 0 to 6 years. For more information, contact Your Health Connection.

