

JLC Issue Corner: *This is the second in a series of articles touching on some of the social challenges in Calgary. We'd like to give you some food for thought by showing how our JLC Healthy and Active Living initiatives fit into the bigger picture.*

What is Childhood Obesity?

What is Childhood Obesity? What causes Childhood Obesity?

Childhood obesity is a medical condition that affects children and teens, whose bodies store too much fat. A sign of obesity is when a child's weight is well above average for their height and age, putting their health and well-being at risk.

Generally, childhood obesity is caused by not only eating too much food but also the wrong types of food such as foods high in sugars and fat (fast foods, pop, candy etc) and not exercising enough. In today's technological world, kids spend a lot of screen time (on the computer, video games and watching television). A Canadian Community Health Survey indicates that children with more than two hours of daily screen time have double the chance of being overweight and obese than those who spend less than one hour a day.

How does this affect children?

According to the Childhood Obesity Foundation, a Canadian registered charity, childhood obesity can lead to both serious medical and psychological disorders such as:

Medical:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure and elevated blood cholesterol
- Metabolic syndrome
- Bone and joint problems
- Liver disease
- Respiratory problems such as asthma
- Sleep disorders such as apnea
- Earlier than normal puberty or menstruation
- Eating disorders (anorexia or bulimia)
- Fatigue
- Skin infections (sweat trapped in folds of skin)

Psychological:

- Poor self esteem, isolation
- Tend to bully others more
- Get bullied
- Depression
- Poor social skills
- Stress, anxiety
- Behaviour, learning problems

Management of Obesity:

The Childhood Obesity Foundation suggests easy daily steps to manage weight referred to as the 5-2-1-0 rule: 5 fruits/veggies per day, 2 hours or less of daily screen time, 1 hour of physical activity, and 0 sugar sweetened drinks

Interesting Stats:

In Canada, over 26% of children and youth (1.6 million children) are considered overweight or obese and that number has almost tripled in the last 25 years. Children and adolescents who eat fruit and vegetables 5 or more times a day are substantially less likely to be overweight or obese than are those with less frequent fruit and vegetable consumption. For children aged 6 to 11 and adolescents aged 12 to 17, the likelihood of being overweight or obese tends to rise as time spent watching TV, playing video games or using the computer increases.

Public Health Concern:

The Canadian Government is promoting healthy eating and physical activity through a number of initiatives. One of them is the Children's Fitness Tax Credit. Effective January 1, 2007, parents can claim a tax credit on up to \$500 of eligible expenses from sport and physical activity programs for each child under the age of 16, promoting physical fitness among children. Other initiatives include ParticipACTION and the revised Canada's Food Guide: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng>. A Canadian Commons committee reports that "today's children will be the first generation for some time to have poorer health outcomes and a shorter life expectancy than their parents." (<http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/story>)

Obesity Initiatives in Calgary:

In the study, "Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids" currently underway, Calgary's Pediatric Obesity Foundation, in conjunction with the Pediatric Weight Clinic, are recruiting children between age 8 and 16 who have a body mass index (BMI) greater than the 85th percentile for their age. This study will give guidance on how to help your kids slim down. For more information, call the foundation at 403-247-8946 or email Roberta at info@pediatricobesityfoundation.ca

How can we help with the Obesity epidemic as part of the Junior League of Calgary?

Activities below are part of our JLC Healthy and Active Living initiative this year:

- DIAD's at Brenda's House will include components for healthy snack making and exercise on October 24 and November 3. We will be working with children ages 2 to 14.
- In 2010, the Spring Provisional class will host JLC's fifth annual Kids in the Kitchen program, where we teach children to make healthy choices and to incorporate fitness in their lives.

References/Resources used: <http://www.childhoodobesityfoundation.ca/whatIsChildhoodObesity>

<http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/story>

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-620-m/2005001/pdf/4193660-eng.pdf>

Calgary Herald, Real Life section, G1, October 15, 2009

Photo from: <http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/story>

Submitted by Jodie Berezney



JLC member, Kathy Deyell helping with snack preparation at the Brenda's House DIAD, October 24