

New food policy a positive step

As of September 1, 2011 all schools in Ontario will be required to comply with the School Food and Beverage Policy released by the Ministry of Education in January 2010.

What this means is only those foods that meet the nutrition standards laid out by Ministry will be permitted to be sold on school property. For example, soft drinks, candy and french fries will no longer be allowed to be sold through vending machines or cafeterias in schools across Ontario.

It also means that hot dog day may look very different. There are groups of parents who work very hard raising funds for the schools their kids attend. Without this, some schools wouldn't have the computers, gym equipment, and extracurricular programming they do.

Often a substantial portion of the funds raised—at times in the tens of thousands of dollars—come from the sale of food through bake sales, submarine /hot dog day, movie nights, etc. The new policy stands poised to present a challenge to this group.

According to results of Halton's Youth Survey, in 2006 14 per cent of Grade 7 students were estimated to be overweight or obese. In 2009/2010, this proportion increased to 16 per cent. Numbers from the most recent Canadian Community Health Survey suggest this increase is a growing trend among Canadian children and if this trend continues, one in four adolescents in Halton will be categorized as overweight in just over a decade. Overweight adolescents and teens are likely to become overweight adults.

The energy balance logic suggests that consuming less calories and expending more energy, would fix the problem. In other words, eat less and move more. Unfortunately, we live in a world, that doesn't foster this.

For example, foods that promote obe-



sity are available everywhere. Tim Hortons has more than 3,000 outlets across Canada and McDonald's website boasts serving millions of customers in Canada every day. Not only is this food highly accessible, it is also costs less to buy.

As per the 2006 Halton Youth Survey, 40 per cent of Grade 7 students in Halton spend three hours or more a day watching TV, DVDs or playing video games and our communities promote the use of cars and inactivity. The odds of our kids navigating through adolescent and teen years and circumventing these obstacles to healthy weights are not good.

The Ministry's new policy isn't likely to reduce the availability or raise the price of a Big Mac, nor is it going to change urban design, but it is a step towards adapting our environments to influence eating habits. It has the potential to positively influence health behaviours of thousands of children.

For more info visit www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/PPM150Quick_Reference_Guide_2010.pdf

—Marcia Dawes is a Georgetown resident and a Masters of Public Health candidate in Community Nutrition at the University of Toronto

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