

Don't let your weight weigh you down

Maintaining a healthy weight is key to preventing chronic diseases

Healthy weights— there is more to it than you think. Maintaining a healthy weight is an important factor in preventing chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, and some types of cancer (breast, endometrial, colon, prostate and kidney).

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health created a report, *Healthy Weights Healthy Lives*, highlighting the growing obesity problem in Canada. Almost 50 per cent of Ontarians are overweight. Childhood obesity rates are rising at an alarming rate. Between 1981 and 1996 obesity rates of children tripled.

Many people believe that individuals are solely responsible for their weight. They believe that weight management is simple; all you have to do is watch what you eat and be more active.

However, achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is much more complex. The environment, especially where you live and work, has a significant impact on your weight and health. Your environment will impact on your ability to obtain adequate sleep, daily physical activity, and healthy meals.

In addition, age (as we age metabolism slows down) and genetics (some people gain weight more easily due to their genes) can contribute to obesity.

Where you live and work will determine how long you spend in a car, which has a direct impact on your weight. Where you live influences how active you may be and in many cases, what food you will eat. Having stores and other amenities within walking distance (10 minutes or less to destination) will influence your decision to walk or drive. When was the last time you or someone in your family walked to the grocery or video store? When you choose to

eat out, can you walk there? Once there, is the food nutritious?

Where you work has an impact on your weight in the following ways. Being employed and how much money you have determines your ability to purchase nutritious foods. A large percentage of the population has sedentary jobs.

Your ability to walk or take public transit to work can impact your weight, and the amount of hours you work determines whether you have time to prepare meals, participate in recreational activities, walk to your destination, or get enough sleep.

Many people today sit in their cars for two hours a day, sit at work for seven hours, drive children to activities, scramble to provide a nutritious meal, get caught up on e-mail, watch a bit of television, spend 30 minutes with their children, and then fall into bed. Often, we are not prepared for the time pressures of our hectic lives. Many of these pres-



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ures are beyond our control.

The Halton Region Health Department is undertaking a community consultation process to address healthy weights in Halton. The process involves speaking to many people and organizations about what can be done locally to create environments that promote healthy weights.

This information will be used to plan a conference. The conference's goal is to recruit local stakeholders to form working groups that will identify and work on projects that support healthy weights.

If you are interested in being involved, please contact Halton Region at 905-825-6000, toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866), or TTY 905-827-9833.

The Region's website is www.halton.ca

Health Notes is prepared by staff of the Halton Region Health Department.

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