

Fight against fat targets small fries

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

Getting kids to eat balanced healthy meals at home is one thing. When dining out, it can be nearly impossible.

Kids are what they eat and according to new statistics, for more than a third, the operative word is fat.

A 2005 Statistics Canada community health survey reports 26 per cent of children and adolescents aged between two and 17 are overweight and 8 per cent are obese.

Sedentary lifestyles in which kids opt to exercise video game and computer controls instead of their bodies combined with poor eating habits are creating a generation of portly juveniles. In fact, overweight rates for 12 to 17 year olds has more than doubled since 1980 and obesity rates have tripled, the report says.

The battle of the young bulge, particularly where kids' restaurant menus are concerned, can be won with some smart choices and parents' encouragement, said York Region Health Services public health nutritionist Mary Turfryer.

"If parents take kids out they should set some simple guidelines," she said. "First, they should try for the three food groups, including grain products, vegetables and fruit, milk products and meat or alternatives.

"Next, limit fried foods per meal. For example, you can have



KRIS JACKSON: Unionville mother has put basic food groups back into her children's diets.

fries or chicken strips, not both. Drink milk, 100 per cent fruit juice or water instead of pop. Lots of kids menus come with desserts. A better idea would be fresh fruit or sherbet, a small ice cream or share cake.

A recent Technomic survey looked at 250 North American restaurant chains, 161 of which had separate kids menus, and found a vegetable entrée offered by only one. Salads were listed 25 times, usually as a side.

On average, kids' menus offer seven stock items: Chicken entrees, burgers, with or without cheese, and pasta account for half the choices. Others include hot dogs and pizza.

It's up to parents and caregivers



MARY TURFRYER: York Region public health nutritionist says parents should limit fried food when eating out.

to steer or at least limit kids from formula foods, Ms Turfryer advised.

"It's a misnomer that pasta is fattening," she said. "Cream sauces, however, are fattening. Have tomato sauce instead. When eating outside the home, avoid fried chicken. If it not, remove the skin. Try and eat only grilled or rotisserie chicken. Ask for a side of veggies or a salad instead of fries."

Hamburgers are a good choice if you avoid special sauces, but a veggie burger is better still, Ms Turfryer said.

The majority of eateries will accommodate special requests or substitutions, particularly those recognized as Eat Smart establishments.

Eat Smart is Ontario's healthy restaurant program. The designation means a food premise has met high standards in food safety, healthy food choices and smoke-free dining. There were 106 Eat Smart award recipient restaurants in York Region last year.

One is The Maid's Cottage in Newmarket, a family restaurant committed to offering healthier menu options, including foods prepared with less fat.

"We don't have a kids' menu per se," said manager Mary Larin. "We do have a lot of salad and low fat choices and we'll low fat an order if requested. For example, if you want chicken, egg or tuna salad, we'll prepare it without the mayo and our servers ask a lot of questions so that customers can have items on the side so they can portion control."

Educating and motivating children to make healthy food choices should begin early, Ms Turfryer said, adding stout kids tend to become overweight adults.

The advice is being put into practice by Unionville mom Kris Jackson who has put the basic food groups back into her three kids' diet.

"We absolutely watch their diet and have eliminated things like hot dogs, processed foods and others," she said. "If we dine out on a special occasion, we frequent restaurants that offer healthy alternatives."

The strategy is working. "They don't order from the kids

MAKING CONTACT

York Public Health dietitians, nutritional fact sheets and referrals are available through Health Connection, 1-800-361-5653.

Eat Smart restaurant listings in York can be accessed on line, www.region.york.on.ca

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating published by Health Canada in print, large print, disk, audio cassette and braille can be accessed on line at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nutrition or by calling 613-954-5995.

Contact Fizz Ed's at 905-881-8555 or visit www.fizzeds.com

menu," she said. "They prefer the adult entrees."

In tandem with the diet debriefing, Ms Jackson has enrolled 10-year-old son James in the recently opened Richmond Hill youth fitness club, Fizz Ed's, which offers interactive sports, exercise and nutritionist-supervised weight loss programs for children aged 10 to 18.

The club, co-owned by vice president Paul Dykeman, is a response to alarming statistics about children who are overweight due to poor eating and exercise habits.

Between 1965 and 1996 the daily intake of soft drinks by 11 to 18 year-olds increased 290 per cent. As well, one in three children and 14 per cent of adults have poor cardiovascular fitness, Mr. Dykeman said.

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