

September 2008



Supporting Parents in the Prevention of Childhood Obesity

By Louise Choquette



Who I represent...

The Best Start Resource Centre:

- Provides information, consultations, resources and training to service providers in the areas of maternal health and early child development
- Over 100 resources can be downloaded or purchased from www.beststart.org
- A program of Health Nexus (formerly the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse)
- Part of the Ontario Health Promotion Resource System (OHPRS)



We know that...

- Obese children are at increased risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, etc.
- The development of the bones may be affected (e.g., the lower leg angling inward) due to the extra weight carried
- The behaviors that cause obesity in children—sedentary lifestyle and poor nutritional habits—track into adulthood
- Obesity and the social determinants of health are related



What we are not so sure about...

In what other ways childhood obesity differs from adult obesity:

- Excess weight may permanently alter the neuropathways in the brain that regulate appetite control or the behavior of the fat cells
- Being heavy in childhood may cause irreversible changes in physiology that can alter the risk for chronic diseases (even if the weight is lost in adulthood)
- There may be additional long-term mental health issues related to poor self-image at a young age



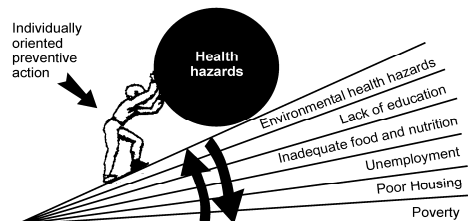
What we are not so sure about...

What some of the other risk factors may be:

- The link between nutrition in supporting the growth of the brain network of neurons right from birth
- The link between the diet during pregnancy and the risk of childhood asthma for the unborn fetus.
- ...



Obesity in the context of the determinants of health



Source: adapted from Making Partners: intersectoral action for health

health nexus
santé

The solution to childhood obesity needs to be multi-faceted

Policy Context

Physical & Social Environment
Home, School, Community

Interpersonal
Family, Friends, Social Networks

Individual
Biological
Psychological
Behavioral Skills

From Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario

health nexus
santé

The parents' role

- Importance of the role of the parents as decision-makers, role models and policy influencers
- Helping parents work with the choices they do have...
- Making the parents part of the solution

health nexus
santé

Let's keep in mind that...

- 5 out of 6 Ontario children are NOT living in poverty
- Over 85% of adult Ontarians have more than a high school diploma (this includes trades certificates)

Let's make sure parents do the part that is under their control, including changing the conditions...

health nexus
santé

A day in the life of 3-year old Jason...

- Woken up at 6:30 am
- Dropped off at daycare at 7 in Pickering
- Mom takes the train to start work in Toronto at 8:30
- Gets picked up from daycare at 6 pm
- Has a « quickly-made » dinner at 6:30
- Gets a bath and goes to bed at 7:30
- On weekends, he watches a lot of TV while his parents try to get everything done around the house
- One can only hope he has a good daycare...

health nexus
santé

**The outcomes...
Obesity and TV viewing**

Hours/day	Obese (%)	Overweight (%)
1 hour or less	~5	~13
1 to 2 hours	~7	~16
More than 2 hours	~10	~24


Source: Statistics Canada. 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey: Nutrition. Children ages 6 to 11.

health nexus
santé

What the parents need...

- To be made aware of the links between the broad life choices they make and the impact on their health and their children's – Step back!
- To have the opportunity to make the best choices in regards to socio-economic conditions.
- To know how to influence policy through their choices, parental involvement and votes.

health nexus
santé



Increasing Awareness


It is critical to have the parents on board right from the start..

Preconception health

- The type of career/job they choose with have an impact on their family/work balance and their ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Mom's obesity at conception may set the stage for the child's obesity risk

Shankar et al., American Journal of Physiology Regulatory, Integrative and Comparative Physiology (doi:10.1152/ajpregu.00316.2007).

health nexus
santé




Increasing Awareness

Breastfeeding

- Babies who were breastfed for one month or longer have a lower body mass index and higher levels of HDL cholesterol (i.e., good cholesterol) in mid-adulthood than bottle-fed babies.
(American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2007)
- Early exposure to human milk may be linked to lower blood cholesterol concentrations in adult life.
(Owen, C.G. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2008; vol 88; pp 305-314)
- Certain types of breast cancer may be rarer among women who breastfeed their babies for at least six months.
(Phipps, A. Cancer, Aug. 25, 2008)

health nexus
santé




Increasing Awareness

The importance of role-modeling
(Survey on adolescents 12-19)

- Girls living with an obese parent have six times higher odds of being obese than children not living with an obese parent.
- For boys, those with an obese parent are almost three times as likely to be obese.
- If the adolescents' parents smoke or eat fruits and vegetables infrequently, the adolescents are likely to mirror these behaviours.
- The parents' level of physical activity is mimicked by their children, but girls tend to be even less active than their parents.


(Source: Statistics Canada, 2000-2001 Canadian Community Health Survey)

health nexus
santé



Increasing Skills

Parents and caregivers need to know how to be more active with their young children



Have a Ball Toolkit:

- Background information
- Resources & ideas


Physical Activity & Early Years Campaign

- Fall of 2009

Note: All in French & English

www.beststart.org

health nexus
santé




Supporting Family Policies

Québec's Family Policy (1997)

- Enhanced maternity and parental leave (first 7 weeks @ 70%, no waiting period)
- Additional father-only parental leave (5 weeks @ 70%)
- Same benefits for self-employed women
- Subsidized early childhood education and child care services (\$7/day)
- Elementary schools provide low-cost before & after-school care and full-day kindergarten is provided to all five-year-olds

Quebec's steady decline in poverty rates has resulted in the greatest overall decrease among provinces. The 2005 child poverty rate was lower than the national average.

health nexus
santé



Some Ideas for Service Providers

- Influence high school curriculum regarding parenting classes
- Emphasize the importance of preconception health to potential parents
- Emphasize the importance of parenting choices and parental responsibilities through parent programs, starting in prenatal programs
- Help parents see the links between policies and health
- Create or support an anti-poverty coalition
- Support provincial policies that enhance family-work balance

Example of Policies Parents Should Support...

- Better funded daycares
- Mandatory parenting classes in high school
- A ban on junk food ads (for everyone!)
- An obligation for restaurants to respect Canada's Food Guide for children's menus
- Increased time for physical activity in schools at all levels
- Legislation requiring employers to provide an additional X days of vacation per child for parents
- Legislation providing greater funding of parental leave
- Municipalities obligated to provide parkland space (no cash-in-lieu)
- ...

Thank you!

Louise Choquette
Best Start Resource Centre
c/o Health Nexus
416-408-2249 or 1-800-397-9567, ext. 2276
l.choquette@healthnexus.ca

www.beststart.org

www.healthnexus.ca