

The good old days were not so good for us after all

The 1950s in North America are often referred to as the “good old days.” The economy had recovered from the Depression and World War II. Society was redefining what a family should look and act like. People were living in country and working in the city; life seemed to be good. In retrospect, the 1950s may have been the turning point towards the unhealthy society we live in today.

Obesity was one of the top leading causes of death in 2013; two of the major contributing factors to obesity are physical inactivity and poor nutrition – and both are modifiable behaviors. As people moved to the suburbs, they were no longer able to walk to work. Their new commute involved driving to work – a sedentary activity.

Another contributor to physical inactivity originating in the 1950s was the introduction of television to mass of society. Children, who were once entertained outdoors by running and playing, were now watching television and other screens for entertainment – another sedentary activity.

Prepared food and fast food were also becoming more refined during the 1950s in order to give people access to easy and quick food options. Society began to portray these easy options as the best and most sophisticated options; people who stayed true to the root of food production were often viewed as lower class. Medical professionals and the media even went as far as saying that breastfeeding was old-fashioned and instead promoted the use of infant formula.

Today we know that fast food and prepared foods are often void of key nutrients and loaded with unhealthy, often artificial, ingredients. We are now shifting back to the basics, encouraging people to find out where their food comes from and how it is produced. Breastfeeding is no longer seen as old-fashioned; breastfeeding is now strongly encouraged by medical professionals because we know it is the safest and healthiest option a woman can give her child.

We are starting to embrace and encourage active living. Children are being encouraged to unplug and play rather than sit in front of a screen. We have started looking towards healthier and more active modes of transportation such as walking, bicycling, transit and carpooling. Municipalities are working on building healthier communities by creating multiuse pathways, bike lanes, and promoting community gardening.

In 2014, North Americans are fighting back against the lifestyle created during “good old days” to create a healthier, more sustainable society for ourselves and future generations.

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