



# Interior Health

**“Canada is a country that creates and maintains the conditions for healthy weight so that children can have the healthiest possible lives”<sup>1</sup>**

This is the vision in the 2011 Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to promote healthy weights report *Curbing Childhood Obesity*. Canada as with most other countries is in the midst of a childhood obesity epidemic. Between 1979 and 2004, the rates of overweight/obesity in children aged 2-17 years increased from 15% to 26% and in youth aged 12-17 years from 14% to 29%. (2)

## **What are the health effects of obesity?**

Childhood obesity may result in medical problems such as:

Type 2 diabetes	High blood pressure and elevated blood cholesterol
Liver disease	Bone and joint problems
Asthma	Sleep disorders (sleep apnea)
Earlier than normal puberty or menstruation	
Metabolic syndrome: a number of conditions associated with high blood insulin levels	

## **What are the psychological effects of obesity?**

Overweight/obese children are more likely to be:

Teased and bullied	More likely to bully others
Have poor self esteem	May feel socially isolated
Increased risk for depression	May have poorer social skills (3)

Children who are overweight/obese in early childhood are more likely to be overweight/obese in adulthood and have an increased risk of: high blood pressure, stroke, cancer, heart disease, liver disease and type 2 diabetes.

Although not eating well and not being active enough are two causes of obesity, there are many complex factors that contribute to the rising rates of overweight and obesity at the individual, family or society level. This problem calls for action and strategies by all levels of government, non-government agencies, public and families to make the healthy choice about diet and physical activity the easy choice for a child.

Part of that strategy is to change sedentary behaviours and engage children aged 5 -11 years in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity. Moderate intensity are activities such as bike riding or playground activities. Examples of vigorous intensity activities include running and

<sup>1</sup> *Curbing Childhood Obesity: An F/P/T Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights*

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Childhood Obesity Foundation, <http://www.childhoodobesityfoundation.ca/complicationsOFChildhoodObesity>

swimming. Changing behaviours includes creating supportive environments where children can live, learn and play that are more supportive of physical activity and healthy eating. Creating supportive environments aligns with the Healthy Families BC Schools provincial initiative which supports the Comprehensive School Health model – an internationally recognized approach for supporting improvements in student’s educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way. Comprehensive School Health is an evidence-based, ‘whole school’ approach that addresses school health via four distinct but inter-related pillars: teaching and learning, social and physical environment, healthy school policy, partnerships and services.

Examples of supportive physical environments are:

1) Supporting more physically active modes of transportation and better access to recreational opportunities such as:

- a) School travel plans that allow children to walk/bike safely to and from school by identification of safe routes.
- b) Easy access to parks and green spaces.

2) Support for increasing the availability and accessibility of nutritious foods.

3) Support for decreasing the availability and accessibility of food and drink that are high in in fat, sugar and sodium.

These are just a few examples of strategies and policies that can be implemented.

## **Resources**

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2010-09-10). *Overview of the Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy*. Retrieved on February 22, 2011, from [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/ipchls-spimmvs-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/ipchls-spimmvs-eng.php)

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