

Editorial Submission

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This is a typical routine of John and family. The children start their day with sweetened cereal and homogenized milk. John and Cathy, on their way to work, pick up their coffee and donut from the drive through at a nearby coffee house.

Although the school is within a walking distance, Cathy prefers to drive the children to their school. She is concerned about their safety.

At work, John prefers to use the elevator instead of the stairs. He picks up his lunches from a nearby restaurant. Cathy has a demanding job and at times she is late coming home, so she picks up fast foods for her family dinner.

At school, the children are not active on the playground during their recess. They get teased because of their weight. Their lunch boxes include a sandwich, cookies, a bag of chips and a flavored drink. Sometimes they eat at the school cafeteria and their favorite foods are pizza, burgers, fries and pop.

After school, their treats include cookies and a flavored drink, instead of healthy snacks such as, milk, yogurt, fruits and fruit juices. They watch T.V. play video games and socialize over the phone or internet until their bedtime.

Family style supper is not a part of their family culture. They have never heard of Canada's Food Guide. Their evening routine does not include any type of physical activity. It would appear that this family takes in more energy than they use and their bodies are banking the excess energy. No wonder, everyone in this family is overweight.

We have an epidemic of overweight and obesity within our community.

Weight gain is a serious mental health issue which often is overlooked by families, friends and physicians. Loneliness, stress, anxiety and depression may cause people to be less physically active and eat more, thus gain weight. On the other hand, people with obesity are discriminated, stigmatized and subjected to hurtful comments; leading them to have a poor self image and withdrawal from social activities.

It would be a lot easier if we blamed it on our social environment, which almost promotes overweight or obesity through super sized food portions, lack of opportunities for physical activities and slick marketing of fast foods. Insufficient knowledge and income in making healthy lifestyle choices also contribute to the problem.

Perhaps we could also blame it to our biological makeup, our genes, family history and some of the prescriptions i.e. antipsychotic medications, on which we have little control.

But wait, before we blame our environment, biological makeup and our family history for our obesity, we must admit that we are equally responsible for making healthy lifestyle choices.

We need to be aware of the fact that increasing metabolism is one of the keys to responsible weight loss. Healthy weight can not be achieved by unhealthy means such as inconsistent dieting, counting calories unwisely, and obsessive exercising. Irresponsible calorie counting can deprive the body of essential nutrients, leaving it with insufficient energy to be physically active. A sudden drop in the calories may result into slower metabolism rate, making it harder to loose weight.

Restricting food choices as a part of our dieting strategy is not necessarily the answer. When we deprive ourselves of certain foods, then there is a tendency to crave for those very foods, especially under stress.

Normal eating is simple, feel hungry as a result of a physical need and eat. However, when the urge to eat continues to remain strong even when there is no true hunger then the obvious conclusions are social and emotional reasons for the urge.

Social factors include gathering of family/friends, celebration of special days etc. Good company coupled with inviting displays of rich aromatic exotic dishes are enough in tempting us to indulge in excessive eating and drinking.

When emotional hunger takes over, then our ability in making rational decisions diminishes. Such hunger is triggered by negative thoughts and feelings. After over-eating, we are left with the feelings of guilt and self criticism.

Food does not have to be a mood regulator, a source of comfort or a security blanket. Food is not a substitute for love.

Starvation is not meant to punish ourselves for our mistakes, or to control others. There are appropriate healthy means to deal with our loneliness, pain and suffering, boredom, anger, anxiety, stresses, disappointments, frustrations, rejection, depression etc.

Food is not a quick fix for our day to day problems. It is not a source of self medication in managing our moods.

If the issue is self image, then we have the choices to work on it, with some professional help, while modifying our eating habits. Since a positive self esteem is at the centre of healthy life style, strategies for modifying our self image can be implemented successfully.

Healthy lifestyles including healthy food choices and physical activities, starts from home life. Children, who eat at home with their families and share activities together, tend to be healthier and happier.

Ultimately, we have the choice of taking control of our lives, to empower ourselves with right information from reputable sources such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, and to maintain our emotional well being. We also have the choice to re-organize our schedule in making sure that healthy foods are prepared in advance, that we are engaged in physical activities and that we have learned the skills to manage our day to day stresses and disappointments.

What stops you from exercising your choices for a healthy lifestyle?

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