

Youth Activity – A Growing Concern

In today's society we have information at our fingertips and a full meal ready in minutes for just dollars. The desire to have the quick fix has left us in a situation where less than 50% of children today get enough exercise to sustain a healthy lifestyle.

In years past, youth were sent outside to play "until supper was ready" and after the home cooked meal was eaten, they were sent back outside to play "until the street lights came on" at which time 20-30 minutes of homework was completed before bed.

The following factors assist in a rising childhood obesity rate:

- Eating too much fast food
- Not eating a nutritiously sound diet
- Watching too much television
- Spending too much time on the Internet
- No outlets for physical activity
- Lack of time
- Lack of interest.

The Province of Ontario recognizes the need for an increase in exercise for youth in our schools. The adoption of Quality Daily Physical Activity (QDPA) was mandated a number of years ago. The reality is that if time is short, physical education and QDPA are the first things cut. In secondary schools in Ontario it is only mandatory that student obtain one credit in physical education. That translates to 5 months of activity in the 40 months a student is enrolled in secondary school. Within that 5 month time period there are a minimum of 21 days (about 1 month) of classroom health time, leaving the majority of student with 4 months of physical activity in their vulnerable years (puberty through adolescence).

What can be done about this epidemic of obesity and depletion of activity levels in our society?

- Prepare nutritious meals – spread meal throughout the day (3 health meals plus 2 nutritious snacks)
- Ensure the optimal 8 hours sleep per night
- Limit complex carbohydrates (found in colas, potato chips, chocolate, etc.)
- Limit television and computer time
- Ask what activities are of interest and determine what is available (never force children to partake in an activity in which they are not interested)
- Have a "family fun day" once per week
- Look for playgrounds, arenas, and sport centres that offer children activities
- Make it fun!

The reality is we parents must take control of our children's health and well-being. Incorporate 30 minutes of physical activity plus proper nutrition and rest into your child's daily schedule, making this a routine which can be carried out throughout their lifetime.

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Off the Record – Summer Edition 2009 (Volume 9)

(Off the Record is a quarterly publication for the legal profession.)