

Fat city



The ever-frustrating battle of the bulge has become less about losing the “love handles” and fitting into that “yellow polka-dot

bikini” and more of a health risk and concern. It is a well-known fact that our healthcare system is being stressed by a growing and aging population. And obesity has now become a new burgeoning strain.

Since 1985, rates of obesity have increased dramatically, with the latest Statistics Canada Community Health Survey estimating that almost half (48 per cent) are either overweight or obese (16 per cent falling into the latter category). Even Stats Canada will admit these rates are likely underestimated since they are based on self-reported data and people tend to overreport their height and underreport their weight. Other studies show that another 10 per cent or so are in a state of denial and are actually overweight. Rates of obesity are highest in the 25-to-44 age group, men being considerably more likely than women to be obese. And even more alarming, the rate has more than doubled among children over the last two decades. A B.C. study in 2004 found that 36 per cent of boys and 25 per cent of girls were either overweight or obese.

So, why are we becoming so fat? It seems that a confluence of social and cultural changes over the years has contributed to this epidemic. The simplest way to look at the problem is the balance between calories in and calories out.

On the “calories in” side of the equation, with the increase in two working parents, few have time to plan and prepare nutritious sit-down dinners, once a daily family event. We now increasingly rely on pre-packaged food eaten on the run or visits to fast-food restaurants. Unfortunately, this results in eating food that is high in fat and low in nutrients. Estimates in B.C. are that 65 per cent are not consuming the recommended five or more fruits and vegetables each day. Furthermore, portion sizes have doubled or tripled by some estimates since the 1950s, with *super-size* now a common word in our lexicon.

On the “calories out” side, our physical activity patterns also have changed dramatically over the years. We have become more reliant on cars (although recent community planning is trying to change that), spending longer hours commuting and more of our time driving our kids around. Kids today are usually driven to school, mainly for safety reasons. And after school, instead of playing freely in their own neighbourhoods and parks, they are being driven from one pre-organized activity or play date to another. Adults and children also are spending increasing amounts of their leisure time sitting in front of computers, television and video games, activities not known to increase heart rates. B.C. fares slightly better in obesity rates because of our more active lifestyle but still our activity rates are not cause for celebration. ActNowBC reports 51 per cent of B.C. residents are not sufficiently active. Even a recent Mustel Group poll showed that only 37 per cent of British Columbians do some form of physical exercise or sports on a daily basis.

It is time to get a move on and instead of lying on the beach this summer lamenting the bulge that has grown over the winter, consider walking on the beach instead – and take your kids with you! **VLM**



Approximately how often do you do any physical exercise or sports?

37%	Almost every day
15%	2–5 times a week
28%	2–3 times a week
7%	About once a week
13%	Less often

Base: 500 B.C. adults. Source: Mustel Group

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