

As the Junk-Food World Turns



Our children and grandchildren are growing up in a junk-food world. To an extent that would have been unimaginable in the 1950s or earlier, kids are being encouraged to eat unhealthy foods.

Especially outside Quebec (where all ads aimed at children under 13 have been banned since 1980), TV commercials, Web sites, and ads urge kids to eat candy, salty snacks, sugary cereals, and soft drinks. Fast-food restaurants and vending machines are plopped down wherever kids and their parents are likely to be—shopping malls, sports arenas, and even schools.

Compounding the problem, notes Carleton University professor Charlene Elliott, is that some of the same companies that market healthy foods to adults sell a parallel array of junk for kids. And kids' "fun food" packages are often festooned with beloved cartoon characters like SpongeBob and other bait.

It should come as no surprise that only a tiny percentage of Canadian children eat enough fruits and vegetables. Millions of kids are eating white bread instead of whole grain, drinking pop instead of water, and consuming far more calories, sodium, sugar, and saturated and trans fat than they should.

And it shows...first in obesity, then in diabetes. (It will take longer for the heart attacks and strokes to start appearing.)

For decades, many nutritionists insisted that "there is no such thing as a good or bad food." Finally, that obsolete idea has been given an official burial by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine.

In April, the institute issued guidelines on which foods are healthy enough to be sold in schools outside of the official breakfasts and lunches. The list includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, water, low-fat or skim milk, and modest portions of 100 per cent fruit juice. With minor exceptions, it excludes most chocolate bars, fried chips, soft drinks, and sports drinks. All foods on the list had to meet limits for bad fats, salt, and sugars.

Canadian officials would do kids a great service by adopting those guidelines. What's

more, federal, provincial, and local officials who care about children's health should ensure that schools have enough funding to reduce their unhealthy reliance on revenues from junk-food sales.

For a generation, Quebec politicians have tried to protect preteens from advertising because it takes advantage of their impressionable minds. Yet after studying childhood obesity for nine months, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health urged the Federal Government to only *study* the Quebec ban.

Will politicians resort to *any* excuse to further stall sensible measures like federal NDP MP Peter Julian's Quebec-styled bill, which would shield preteens from the incessant barrage of commercial exhortations to eat, drink, and be idle?

For their part, health officials and activists have been ratcheting up the pressure. For instance, the Centre for Science in the Public Interest (the non-profit publisher of *Nutrition Action*) and others have been negotiating with Kellogg and threatening to sue Viacom (owner of the Nickelodeon cable channel and characters like SpongeBob) to get them to stop marketing junk food to kids.

It's not enough for politicians to fawn over fast-food and candy companies that make vague promises to promote health and physical fitness. To send a message urging your MP to support Julian's bill, click on "Fax your MP" at cspinet.org/canada.

With your help, we can make changes that lead to healthier diets and, of course, healthier kids.

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Centre for Science in the Public Interest

Correction

In the April cover story, we mistakenly implied that incomplete proteins in plant foods are a problem for vegans. In fact, as long as vegans get enough protein and calories, they don't need to combine foods to get complete proteins.

The contents of NAH are not intended to provide medical advice, which should be obtained from a qualified health professional.

The use of information from **Nutrition Action Healthletter** for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission from CSPI.

The Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is the non-profit health-advocacy group that publishes *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. CSPI mounts educational programs and presses for changes in government and corporate policies.

Design and production by The Page Group (www.pagegroup.com).

The next issue of **Nutrition Action Healthletter** will be a combined July/August issue. It should be in your mailbox by late July.

STAFF

EDITORIAL

Michael Jacobson, PhD
Executive Editor

Bonnie Liebman, MS
Director of Nutrition

Stephen B. Schmidt
Editor-in-Chief

Jayne Hurley, RD
David Schardt
Senior Nutritionists

Danielle Hazard, BS
Kirsten Bokenkamp, BS
Kate Sherwood, MS
Project Coordinators

Sarah Kaplan, BA
Administrative Assistant

Namita Davis, BSc
Tina Babouchian, RD
Deborah Cohen, RD
Marsha Rosen, RD
Consultants (Toronto)

Lauren Clark, RD
Consultant (Ottawa)

Bill Jeffery, LLL
National Coordinator (Ottawa)

CIRCULATION MANAGEMENT

Dennis Bass

Debra Brink James Nocera
Damon Dorsey Myriam Pierre
Louella Fennell Cecilia Saad
Greg Hildebrandt Chris Schmidt
Ken Waldmiller

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD

Monique Julien, MSc, DrPH
Université de Montréal
Montréal, Québec

Andrew Pipe, CM, MD, LLD, DSc
University of Ottawa Heart Institute
Ottawa, Ontario

Kim Raine, PhD, RD
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

Frank Sacks, MD
Harvard Medical School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Jeremiah Stampler, MD
Northwestern University Medical School
Chicago, Illinois

Norman Temple, PhD
Athabasca University
Athabasca, Alberta

Regina G. Ziegler, PhD, MPH
U.S. National Cancer Institute
Bethesda, Maryland

Nutrition Action Healthletter (ISSN 0885-7792) is published 10 times a year (monthly except bi-monthly in Jan./Feb. and Jul./Aug.).

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

The cost for a one-year subscription or gift (10 issues) is \$36; two years are \$66 (GST/HST included). Mail to P.O. Box 70373, Toronto Sta. A, Toronto, ON M5W 2X5. For bulk subscriptions, please write for details. To change your address, send us your subscriber number and your old and new addresses four weeks before you move. If you don't want us to exchange your name, send us your name and mailing-label information. Fax: (202) 265-4954. E-mail: circ@cspinet.org. World Wide Web: www.cspinet.org. Expiry date is in the upper centre of your mailing label. Your subscriber number precedes the expiry date. **GUARANTEE! We'll give you 2 FREE ISSUES if there's ever a problem with your subscription.**

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT
NO. 40017740
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO
CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST
P.O. BOX 4252, POSTAL STATION A
TORONTO, ONTARIO M5W 5S4
email: circ@cspinet.org

©2007 Centre for Science in the Public Interest.

