



# It Was 40 Years Ago Today...

BY DAVID SCHARDT

In 1971, when the Centre for Science in the Public Interest—the non-profit consumer-advocacy group that publishes *Nutrition Action Healthletter*—set up shop in Washington D.C. (the Canadian shingle wouldn't come out until 1996), the food world looked very different from what it is today.

Foods like tofu, whole wheat bread, and brown rice were hard to come by. People made their own yogurt, smoothies, and granola. Salads were mostly iceberg lettuce, milk was mostly homogenized, and coffee was either black or with cream and sugar. We cooked more and snacked less. We ate less and weighed less.

Here's a brief stroll down memory lane to remember how much things have changed.

*Natalie Walsh and Neera Chaudhary in Toronto helped compile the information for this article.*

## Everyone Gets a Microwave

By the end of the 1970s, roughly five out of every 100 Canadian households owned a microwave oven. Today, only about five out of 100 *don't*.



## Eating Out Becomes In

By the early 1980s, Canadians were spending 25 cents of every food dollar on meals prepared outside the home. By 2001, it was up to 30 cents. It's probably even more today.

While convenient, food prepared away from home typically has more calories (and sodium). Combine that with ballooning restaurant portions and it's easy to see why it's so tough to take (or keep) weight off.



## Big Mac's Legacy Lingers

The first McDonald's outside the United States opened in Richmond, British Columbia, in 1967. That was the same year in which the company introduced its large two-patty hamburger, the Big Mac.

Today, there are 1,400 McDonald's across Canada...and the Big Mac doesn't seem so big. Its 540 calories are dwarfed by, among others, Burger King's Whopper (670 calories), McDonald's Angus Burger with Bacon and Cheddar (770 calories), and Wendy's Bacon Deluxe Triple hamburger (1,160 calories).



## Supplement Takers Get Some Help

More than one in four Canadians say that they use vitamins, herbs, homeopathic

medicines, or other natural health products every day.

For years, there was little consumers could do to figure out whether those supplements worked and were safe. But in 2004, Health Canada set up the National Health Products Directorate to review the evidence behind—and to licence—the estimated 40,000 to 50,000 natural health products that were on the market.

Since then, more than 40 per cent of the licence applications have been rejected or withdrawn, mostly because the manufacturers couldn't substantiate the claims they were making.



## Here a Tim, There a Tim...

In 1964, the first Tim Hortons opened, in Hamilton, Ontario. It served just coffee and doughnuts. By 1977, the chain had 76 outlets with \$20 million in annual sales.

Today, more than 2,500 Tim Hortons restaurants sell almost \$3 billion a year in sandwiches, soups, baked goods, coffees, and, of course, plenty of doughnuts and "Timbits."

Having a Tim's nearby, wherever you happen to be (even if you're stationed in Afghanistan), is a major reason why Canadians eat more doughnuts per capita than the citizens of any other country.



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## Canadians are Eating More Food...and More Calories

In 1976, Canadians consumed an average of 2,360 calories a day. By 2002, it had jumped to 2,790 calories. (We can only imagine what the next survey will show.)

Those extra 430 calories a day are more than enough to account for the steady expansion of Canadians' bellies.

What are people eating more of? Lots of things, but mostly cheese, oil used in deep-frying and salad dressings, and pop.

## Nutrition Facts Labels Ride to the Rescue

If you read a typical food label in 1971, you wouldn't have had a clue how many calories or how much fat or sodium was in each serving.

Shopping for healthy foods got a lot easier in 2002, when "Nutrition Facts" labels began to appear on food labels. (They became mandatory in 2005.)

Today, three out of five shoppers say that they "usually" or "always" use the labels to help figure out what to buy.

## Organic Foods Go Mainstream

By 1971, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, which exposed the damage that pesticides could do to wildlife, had been out for nine years. And the Rodale family was preach-



ing sustainable farming in its magazine *Organic Gardening*. But you couldn't buy organic produce in your grocery store, no matter what you were willing to spend.

In 1999, Canada's first national organic standards were published, laying out the rules that farmers had to follow if they wanted to label their foods "organic."

Today, organic food is a \$2-billion-a-year industry, fresh and processed organic food is available virtually everywhere, and nearly half of Canadian consumers say that they buy organic foods "sometimes" or "often."

## Imported Foods Soar

In the early 1970s, imported food typically meant something like a jar of Spanish olives, a bottle of Italian olive oil, or a bar of Swiss chocolate.

And, of course,

bananas from Central America. Today, it could be anything from fresh mozzarella from Italy to frozen peas from China.

About 30 per cent of the food Canadians buy is imported from nearly 200 countries. That means peaches and cherries in the winter and fresh salmon all year round. Some 40 per cent of all the fish, fruits, and vegetables that Canadians buy comes from somewhere else.

## Obesity Rates Spin Out of Control

In 2008, when the producers of "Taking Woodstock" began casting for their movie dramatizing the 1969 concert, their biggest challenge was to find extras who were as skinny as the original concertgoers.

Not that everybody was lean back then. In the 1970s, five out of ten Canadian adults were overweight or obese. Today, it's six out of ten. And the obese have swelled

from one out of seven Canadians over the age of 18 to one out of four.

Excess weight increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and osteoarthritis.

And youngsters aren't immune to the epidemic. More than a quarter of Canadian children are overweight or obese. That's double what it was in the 1970s.

Public health experts worry that extra pounds may make today's children the first generation to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.



## Trans Fat Plummets

In the 1970s and 1980s, food manufacturers began to ramp up the amount of partially hydrogenated canola and soybean oils in their products...and Canadians began consuming more trans fat. (Trans is created when oil is partially hydrogenated to make shortening and stick margarine.)

By the mid-1990s, Canadians had one of the highest intakes of trans fat in the world.

But by then, researchers were beginning to see that trans fat raises LDL ("bad") cholesterol and lowers HDL ("good") cholesterol, which is a double whammy for your heart.

In 2005, Canada became the first country to require that packaged foods disclose the amount of trans fat in each serving. Not surprisingly, food manufacturers began to seriously cut back on the partially hydrogenated oil.

Today, Canadians consume about 40 per cent less trans fat than they did a decade ago.

Bravo! 🍷

