

Are Canadian Dads Making their Kids Fat?

New Research Suggests Dads are Key to Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity numbers are on the rise across this country and fathers may be responsible. New research released in Canada ahead of Canadian Men's Health Week notes children are more likely to pick up eating behaviours from their fathers than their mothers and that obese dads have a disproportionately greater chance of having obese children.

According to Statistics Canada, 65% of men in this country are obese. What may be worse is they are raising kids that may also be destined to be obese. It's no wonder child obesity rates are on the rise. In 2014, 23 % of Canadian children, and 28.5% of boys in particular, were overweight or obese. Furthermore, most adolescents do not outgrow obesity and many continue to gain excess weight. If current trends continue, by 2040, up to 70% of adults aged 40 or over will be either overweight or obese.

Now, new research is pointing to a key factor that has been overlooked in previous efforts to study child obesity and, by association, attempts to address the issue: fathers.

According to the Guelph Family Health Study, led by researchers at the University of Guelph and published in the June issue of *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism*, fathers are the critical stakeholders in the development of children's health behaviours. The research reveals that kids mimic their fathers' eating habits, not their mothers'.

Wayne Hartrick, President of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation, the main proponent behind Canadian Men's Health Week, says, "It's important for men to take a leadership role in their health and in that of their children. This research suggests if a dad eats poorly, his children have a higher risk of having poor nutrition and weight issues, so we want to men to understand that being a good dad also means being a healthy dad."

The Canadian research underscores studies conducted in other top universities around the globe. A 2011 study conducted at the University of Newcastle in Australia followed 8-9-year-olds over four years and found that children with an obese father and a healthy weight mother at the beginning of the study were 10 times more likely to develop obesity four years later compared to children who had two parents without obesity. The same numbers aren't true for obese mothers.

Dr. Larry Goldenberg, Chairman of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation, says his organization's goal is to help men understand that making positive changes doesn't need to be overwhelming. "You don't have to change everything you're doing overnight to have better health. Small changes, maintained over time, have a big health impact."

That concept is the driving force behind the organization's "Don't Change Much" campaign, which aims to encourage men to make small but lasting changes in their lives. Adds Hartrick, "Small changes will make dad healthier and, according to this research, result in healthier kids. Isn't that the legacy we all want?"

ABOUT CANADIAN MEN'S HEALTH FOUNDATION

Canadian Men's Health Foundation (CMHF) is a national, not for profit organization with a mission to inspire Canadian men and their families to live healthier lives. The statistics around men's health in Canada are alarming; 70% of men's health problems can be prevented by adopting healthy lifestyles. Learn more at MensHealthFoundation.ca, YouCheck.ca and DontChangeMuch.ca.

ABOUT CANADIAN MEN'S HEALTH WEEK

Canadian Men's Health Week is a nationally recognized week dedicated to improving the health of men in our country. The week will be from Monday June 12th – Sunday June 18th, (Father's Day). The week serves as an opportunity to raise awareness of men's health issues and provide tips and tools for men and their families to live healthier lives.

Backgrounder on Obesity Rates

According to Statistics Canada, child obesity rates are on the rise:

- In 2011, 20% of young Canadians, aged 12 – 17 were considered overweight and obese. That number rose to 23% in 2014.
- When we look at young boys in particular, the number jumped from 23.5% to 28.5%. That totals almost 307,000 overweight boys across this country.

Male Obesity statistics:

- According to the World Health Organization, 39% of adults around the world were overweight or obese.
- According to Statistics Canada, 65% of Canadian men are overweight or obese *** the rate is more than 50% higher than the WHO worldwide rates.
- Canada ranks amongst the worst of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries for adult obesity rates.

MEDIA REQUESTS

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