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 Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

Institut national
 de santé publique

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**Eating habits, exercise and weight
 in Iiyiyiu Aschii**

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Results from the
 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey

May 2007

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This report is a summary of a longer paper entitled *Nutrition, physical activity, and body weight*.

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Eating habits

Good eating habits help people to stay healthy or to improve their health. For people to eat well, good foods must be available and affordable. Besides this, people need to know about healthy eating habits, and to choose foods based on what they know.

How many people in Iiyiyiu Aschii face problems buying food?

A basket of food can cost twice as much in Iiyiyiu Aschii as in Montreal. High costs may help explain why one adult in four says they faced problems paying for food in the past year:

- ◆ 24% worried about having enough money for food.
- ◆ 21% said lack of money forced them to eat a poor quality or boring diet.
- ◆ 23% had times when they had to cut back on how much they ate.

The chances that a person will lack money for food are about equal in the coastal and inland communities, and among people of all ages. People who live in large households (6 or more members) are especially likely to report problems paying for food.

What the survey asked about nutrition

The survey asked people...

- ◆ How often they eat fruits and vegetables
- ◆ Whether they choose or avoid certain foods because of their food value, or because of concerns about health
- ◆ If they sometimes
 - ◇ run out of money for food;
 - ◇ worry about running out of food;
 - ◇ eat a boring or poor diet because of lack of money.

How are people choosing what foods to eat?

Over half of all adults report choosing or avoiding certain foods for reasons of health or nutrition (food value). And (like people in most western countries), five out of ten adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii try to control their weight by choosing or avoiding some foods.

Women, and older adults, are most likely to choose foods with an eye to health and food value. This also holds true of people living in the inland communities, and those with higher levels of education. Young men, on the other hand, rarely mention these aspects.



Eating habits (cont'd)

How many people in Iiyiyiu Aschii eat enough fruits and vegetables?

Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins, fibre, and folic acid. These elements help reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Canada's Food Guide suggests that people eat 5-10 servings of fruit and vegetables (including juice) each day.

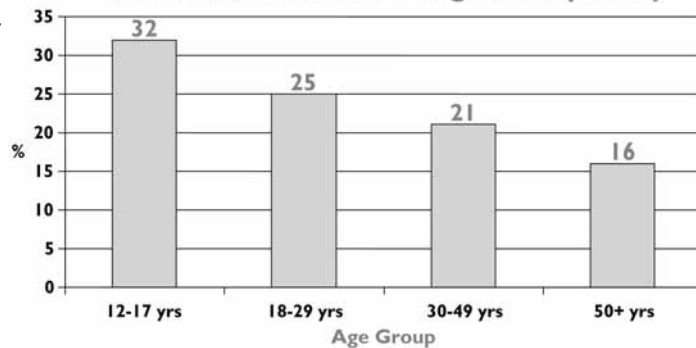
In Iiyiyiu Aschii, only one person in five (21%) eats at least five fruits and vegetables each day. This is far below the rest of Quebec, where one person in two (51%) meets the Food Guide standard. Part of the reason may be that it is harder to get fruits and vegetables in the north. High cost, poor quality, and lack of variety may all discourage people from buying fruits and vegetables.

Whatever the reason, people in Iiyiyiu Aschii are eating only slightly more fruits and vegetables than they were in 1991.

Which groups of people are most likely to get enough fruits and vegetables?

First, people eat more fruits and vegetables in the inland communities than in the coastal ones. A third of inland residents eat at least five fruits or vegetables per day, compared to just 14% of coastal residents.

Fig. 1: Percent of people in each age group who eat at least five fruits or vegetables per day



Second, younger people seem to eat more fruits and vegetables. In most populations, food habits vary with a person's age and sex. This also holds true in Iiyiyiu Aschii, where people over age 50 eat the fewest fruits and vegetables, while youth 12-17 eat the most. This is partly because youth report drinking more fruit juices than older people. However, the youths' reports may overstate the facts. A survey elsewhere in Quebec found that often, when youth say that they drank juice, they actually had a fruit-flavoured drink rather than real fruit juice.



Physical activity

To stay healthy, people need to be fairly active at all ages. Until the start of the 20th century, physical activity was a part of daily life for most peoples in the world. Now, people get much less exercise than they used to.

Are youth in Iiyiyu Aschii active enough?

Like other youth in Quebec, only half the youth in Iiyiyu Aschii get as much exercise as they should for their age. The other half are not active enough, and many of them get less than half the exercise they ought to.

Teenage boys and girls have very different activity levels: 59% of boys, but only 33% of girls, are very active in their free time. However, boys and girls are about equally likely to get exercise by walking or biking to their activities. All told, 90% of youth say that they walk to activities—a much

What the survey asked about physical activity

The survey asked people...

- ◆ How often (and for how long) they had done any of a list of leisure activities in the past three months
- ◆ How many hours they spent walking or biking to activities in a typical week
- ◆ How physically demanding their work was

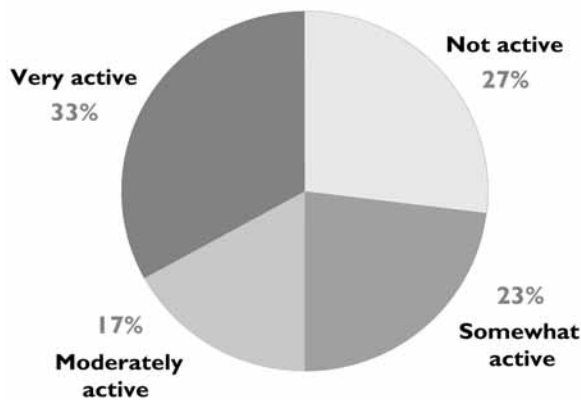
higher proportion than in other parts of Quebec. A third of these youth report that they spend six or more hours each week walking to activities. Despite this, the youth who walk are just as likely as others to be overweight.

Physical activity (cont'd)

Are adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii active enough?

Two-thirds of adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii are not active enough to gain the health benefits of exercise. Figure 2 shows that 27% of adults are not at all active, while another 40% get some exercise, but not enough to improve their health. Only a third (33%) are very active in their free time.

Fig. 2: Activity levels of adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii
Leisure activities, Summer 2003



Although 41% of men are active in their free time, this holds true for only 23% of women. And while the men in Iiyiyiu Aschii are about as active as those elsewhere in Quebec, Iiyiyiu women report less activity than those in other parts of the province.

Besides what they do in their free time, people may get exercise in the course of their work or because they walk places. As in the rest of Quebec, about 10% of adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii (especially men) say that their work involves physical effort. And three quarters of all adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii—both men and women—say that they walk to their activities. A third of them walk at least six hours per week. But this does not seem to affect their weight.

Which people tend to be most active in their free time?

The active people are usually the ones who:

- ♦ have higher levels of education
- ♦ eat more fruits and vegetables each day
- ♦ live in the Inland communities.

Besides this, the people with active leisure pastimes are often the same ones who walk places and work at physically demanding jobs. The survey found that people who are not active in their leisure time are unlikely to make up for it by being active in other ways. Health workers need to encourage physical activity—especially among women and people living in the coastal areas.

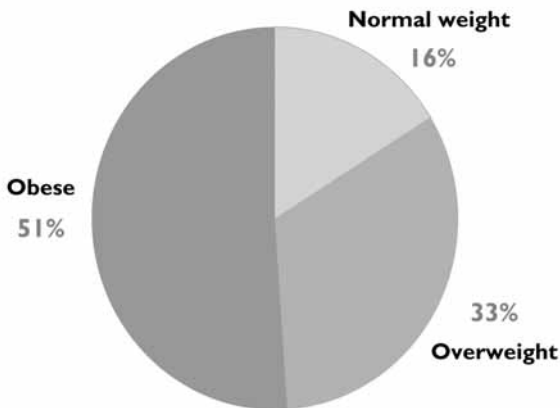


Weight (cont'd)

How many people are overweight in Iiyiyiu Aschii?

Most adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii (84%) weigh more than they should. As shown in Figure 3, a third of all adults are overweight, and another half are very overweight (obese). These are much higher proportions than in the rest of Quebec. Further, almost half of the youth (12-17 years) in Iiyiyiu Aschii weigh more than is considered healthy.

Fig. 3: Weight of adults in Iiyiyiu Aschii
(Based on Body Mass Index)



More and more people in Iiyiyiu Aschii are becoming obese. Comparisons to 1991 show that rates of obesity are rising especially fast in youth and young adults. This suggests a need for school programs to prevent obesity.

Which groups of people are most likely to be obese? In Iiyiyiu Aschii—unlike the rest of the province—more women than men are obese. Besides this, the people who are most likely to be obese are those who:

- ◆ are inactive during their leisure time
- ◆ eat fewer fruits and vegetables per day
- ◆ have less education.

Some people don't realize that they are overweight. When adults were asked how they felt about their own weight, only 58% said they weighed too much, although the survey classed 84% as overweight or obese. Similarly, only one third of youth felt they were too heavy, although the survey results suggest that half are. Public health workers need to be aware of this gap between what the Body Mass Index says and what people believe.



