



The Active Kids Project

How healthy are the children of Waskaganish and Mistissini?

This report reviews the results of a study done in Waskaganish and Mistissini in 2004 and 2005

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Information collected from students in grade 4-6

- 1) Do the children have healthy weights?
- 2) What are the children eating?
- 3) Are the children active?
- 4) Are the children physically fit?
- 5) Are children happy with the way they look?

1. Body size of children

- 65% of children were overweight or obese. These children weighed too much and likely had too much body fat.
- 35% had a healthy body weight. This means that their weight was appropriate for their height.

2. What are children eating?

- Children were asked what they ate on 2 weekdays, 1 weekend.
- Children were asked if they ate at a restaurant or at home.
- Children were asked if they ate take-out or home-cooked food.

What did the researchers learn?

25% of the total food energy (calories) the children ate was from *unnecessary* and unhealthy food.

- Juice or sweet drinks (pop, Tang, Kool-Aid, Sunny-D, fruit punch, Gatorade)
- Unhealthy snack food (chips, nachos, etc)
- Poutine
- Pizza
- Fried chicken

Other important things learned about what children are eating:

- Chicken was frequently eaten by the children, but almost all of the chicken was fried or battered (chicken fingers, wings, nuggets, etc.). This is a very unhealthy way to prepare chicken.
- Most children ate less than two fruits *or* vegetables per day.
(5 servings recommended for good health)
- Children did not get enough fibre because they did not eat whole grain foods (brown bread, oatmeal, All Bran, Shredded Wheat), baked beans, and fruits and vegetables.
 - Fibre is important to prevent constipation and for good blood sugar and blood fat levels.
- Children did not eat much traditional food. Traditional food is a healthy choice for children.
- Many children drank milk, which is a good source of calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones.
 - Children need 3 to 4 glasses of 1% or skim milk per day.
- Children who ate no meals at the restaurant or from take-out in the three days had a better diet.
 - They drank fewer sweetened beverages such as pop.
 - They ate less poutine and pizza.

Some suggestions on how to make children's diets healthy:

Our body is like a bank account. If we eat more calories than we burn off with activity, we gain weight. If we burn off more calories than we eat, we lose weight.

Children would consume 25% fewer calories if they did not have sweetened beverages, unhealthy snack foods (potato chips), poutine and pizza.

Eating home cooked food instead of restaurant and take-out food is much healthier.

To reduce fat intake, children should remove the skin from chicken. Chicken should be baked or roasted, not deep fried.

Eating more traditional foods as well as fruits and vegetables is very important because these foods replace unhealthy snacks and meals with healthy food choices (a double bonus!).

Giving money to children to buy snacks and lunches at the restaurants/take outs is teaching them unhealthy habits and increasing the problem of childhood obesity.

3. How is the physical fitness of the children?

Children were asked to run back and forth in the gym until they were out of breath and could no longer run. The longer a child ran, the more fit they were. This is an excellent way to test fitness, but the test is motivational. That is, some children may have quit the test before they ran out of breath.

83% of children had very low fitness levels. This means that they could not run for very long in the gym.

Obese children were the least physically fit. They were not able to run as long as the other children. (Or they quit sooner.)

Children with a healthy weight were the most fit. (Or they were the most motivated to run.)

4. How active are the children?

Children were asked to wear a step-counter for two days. The step-counter recorded the number of steps that a child took when walking, running or playing.

Many children were not active enough for good health.

For good health, boys should take 15,000 steps per day and girls should take 12,000 steps per day.

**Only 3 out of 5 boys and 1 out of 2 girls
took the recommended number of steps per day.**

Some children took as few as 2000 steps in a day (about 20 minutes of walking in a whole day!)

Some children were very active and took up to 30,000 steps in a day.

5. Were children happy with the way they looked?

- Children were shown drawings of thin and heavy children. They were asked to pick the drawing that they would like to look like.
- Children were asked which drawing “looked the best”.
- Many obese and overweight children felt that their body was too big.
- Many children would have preferred to be thinner.
- Some children (mostly boys) with a healthy body weight felt that their body size was too small.

Children might be unhappy or embarrassed about the way they look. Children should be encouraged to eat healthy food because it tastes good and to be active because it is fun, not because of the way they look.

Summary

- One in three children was obese.
- Most children were not physically fit.
- Half of children were not active enough for good health.
- Most children did not eat enough fruits and vegetables.
- Children did not eat enough whole grain foods and foods with fibre.
- “Junk” food was an important source of calories and fat.
- Many children would have preferred to be thinner.

Next Steps

- Communities could try to find ways to change children’s lifestyles so that children eat better and are more active
- Community members could work together to find ways to help the children learn healthy eating habits and learn how to be more active.
- This will require the support and leadership of the School, the Parent Committee, as well as the parents of the children of the communities.
- Interventions (programs) that promote healthy child development are needed.

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Thank You

For more Information

If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

Your community CHR

Or

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