



Outdoor Kids = Healthy Kids

By Suzan Bianchi

Imagine sitting in your doctor's office and being told that you're at very high risk for type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and a slew of other weight-related medical conditions.

Now imagine that the doctor is your pediatrician and you haven't graduated elementary school yet. Sounds extreme? Not really.

Childhood obesity has become a common occurrence across Canada.

According to the Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) report *Healthy Active Living for Children and Youth* (2002), "the prevalence of childhood obesity in Canada has tripled from 1981 to 1996." While it's common knowledge that taking in more calories than burned causes excess weight gain, the CPS cites another correlation: "Recent studies have shown that obese children and adolescents ingest about 20% more energy [calories] than normal weight controls... While the instance of juvenile obesity has increased over the past decade, there has been a decrease in overall fat consumption by the general population. This suggests that physical inactivity also plays an important role in the development of obesity."

Unfortunately for children, a lifestyle fueled improperly by inadequate nutrition and inactivity has brought on more harm than simply carrying around unhealthy excess weight. "A sedentary lifestyle and the consumption of foods that are high in total energy and fat content are factors that are associated with

obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, inadequate bone mineralization and poor mental health," says the CPS report.

Dr. Kristen Hallett, a pediatrician in Owen Sound, Ontario and a spokesperson for the CPS' Healthy Active Living Committee, has seen all this in her six years of practice. "I'm not just seeing heavier children," she says, "I'm also seeing obesity-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and fatty liver disease in patients as young as 10 or 11 years old."

By all accounts, we're raising a generation of children with very adult health risks — both physical and mental. "Osteoporosis is a risk because kids just aren't running around and pounding the pave-

ment, so to speak, in order to build bone density," continues Dr. Hallett. "We also know that when you're obese as a child or adolescent, you have a higher rate of depression and low self esteem."

While the immediate effects are very real for these kids, projecting 10 years down the road only seems to make matters worse. "If you look at the non-medical, economic future," continues Dr. Hallett, "then these kids are potentially going to have complications in their 20s and 30s — when they should be working, paying taxes and raising their own children — that other generations were getting in their 60s and 70s."

Childhood obesity is a very complicated issue. Combating it, however, isn't, but it does require complex implementation measures. Dr. Hallett stresses that many contributing factors are to blame for this trend, "but physical activity is huge." Are children somehow being programmed to sit rather than walk or run? And where is this influence coming from: home, school or both?



In a time when parents are burdened with cramped schedules and days that are filled with driving kids to and from school and other engagements, combined with the reliance on television, computers and video games, the solution simply cannot rest solely on mom and dad. The old adage “it takes a vil-

“There’s also the spiritual aspect of being outside that has a huge impact on mental health. This has been shown in study after study from the Canadian Mental Health Association.”

Not to mention the positive social implications of being outside. “It’s also important because kids just

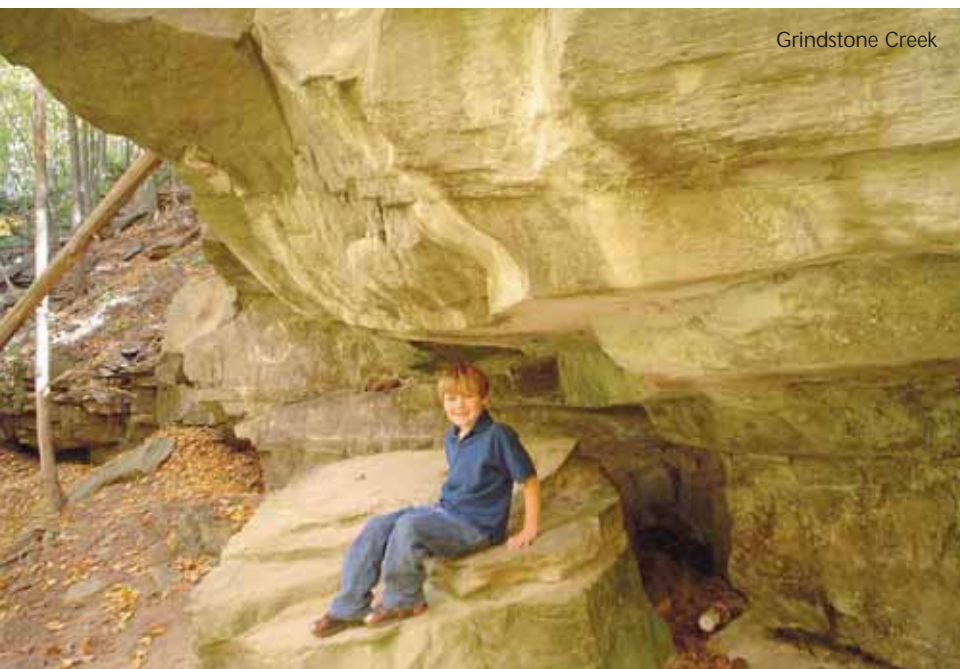
club for the school’s 400 students, the results were surprising and encouraging. “About 150 of the kids came out on the first run,” says Smith. “When the teachers asked parents to become involved, I put together a training plan to get them to run longer distances progressively. The kids not only went on scheduled runs, they also gave up part of their lunch break, ran around the schoolyard during 10-minute recess and stuck around after school to run.”

Having four kids of their own, Smith and his wife Lee-Ann recognize the time constraints faced by parents. “It does take extra effort to get four kids out for a walk on the Bruce Trail,” he says, “but we’ve noticed a huge difference in our kids when we get them out there. A sense of wonder comes over them as they run around the Trail and explore. A real transformation takes place.”

Kids have tons of physical and mental energy — naturally. How that energy is channeled is what effects their physi-

cal and emotional health and physical activity gives kids the greatest advantage. When asked about how much activity children should get, Dr. Hallett cites the standard equation of starting with 30 minutes every day and adding another 15 minutes per day every month until they’re getting 1.5 hours a day.

“But,” she qualifies, “my real answer is as much as possible. Get outside. Anything you do outside is good: go for a walk, go for a toboggan, play tag, run up and down hills. It’s free and there aren’t any negative effects of playing outside.”



Grindstone Creek

lage to raise a child” has never been truer when raising healthy and happy kids.

“The solution lies with the whole community,” says Louise Daw, the Ontario consultant for the Physical Activity Resource Centre (PARC). “You can’t put the onus on teachers or parents. Our lives have changed so drastically that there must be a shared responsibility.” Managed by the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA), PARC’s mandate is to support physical activity promoters who work in public health, community health and recreation centres across the province.

With a background in kinesiology and the health sciences, and as a mother, Daw recognizes the importance of outdoor play. “I’m a huge advocate of outdoor activity where the environmental component has a connection to nature,” says Daw.

aren’t being taught to interact because they don’t have the social connection outside of their home,” continues Daw.

Without doubt, our lives have changed to include more sedentary indoor activities. But how do you get children to put down that video game control panel and head outside even if only for a family walk after lunch?

“Once you give kids active choices, they’ll choose not to just sit there and watch TV,” maintains Clayton Smith, who recently ran the Bruce Trail’s entire 850-kilometres in 15 days to raise Trail awareness and money for three worthwhile charities. Smith has witnessed first hand how kids will be outdoor active when given the chance.

Smith’s children attend Charles R. Beaudoin Public School in Burlington, Ontario. When two teachers decided to start a running

Online Resources

To find out more about childhood obesity in Canada along with recommendations and information on physical activity, visit these online resources.

Canadian Pediatrics Society: www.cps.ca

Physical Activity Resource Centre: www.ophea.net/parc/

The Heart and Stroke Foundation: www.heartandstroke.ca





Great kid hikes

on the Bruce Trail

Beamer's Falls Conservation Area

Kid Impressive Feature

A top spot for watching the annual spring or fall migration of birds. The upward current of heat from the Niagara Escarpment creates "thermals" which enable birds to fly along the Escarpment without having to constantly flap their wings. Watch for the "big birds" -- eagles, ospreys, hawks, and turkey vultures -- as well as many other species.



Photo by Bill Crawford

Directions & Parking

From the Queen Elizabeth Way, take the # 71 exit to Christie Street which becomes Mountain Road. Go right on Ridge Road for 2.5 km to Quarry Road, then turn right. The entrance is approximately one-half of a kilometre on your right. There may be a modest admission charge into the conservation area.

Bruce Trail Reference Guide
Map # 5.

Mount Nemo Conservation Area

Kid Impressive Feature

The "Mount" offers a commanding view of Lake Ontario and Toronto to the east including the CN Tower (the Tower's observation deck is only a little more than 100 metres higher than Mount Nemo).

Directions & Parking

From the Queen Elizabeth Way, exit at Guelph Line. Continue approximately 10 kilometres north. The entrance is on your right, opposite Colling Road. There is a small admission charge.

Bruce Trail Reference Guide
Map # 10.



The Hole in the Wall

Kid Impressive Feature

Climb down a ladder into a deep, cool rock crevice

Directions & Parking

Take Hwy 401 to Trafalgar Rd. (exit #328) north to stoplights at Hwy 7. Turn left on Hwy 7 to County Rd. 43. Turn left on Country Rd 43 and follow it to Limehouse. In Limehouse, turn left and cross the railway bridge. Turn left on Fifth Line and follow south for 1 km to the park on left. Parking available near the baseball diamonds.



Hike Directions

You will see the blue side trail blazes as you enter from the parking lot; this is the Limehouse Side Trail. Follow these until you connect with the white blazes of the main Bruce Trail. Follow the main Trail left past a number of rock fissures before climbing down the "Hole in the Wall" which is accessed by two ladders. Less than 500 metres to the Hole in the Wall from parking lot. Best for kids over 3, strollers not recommended.

Bruce Trail Reference Guide
Map #12



Mono Cliffs

Kid Impressive Feature

Explore the cliff top upon a dolomite escarpment face, home to ancient dwarf cedars, an isolated rock outlier, a glacial spillway, mixed forests, swamps, streams, spring fed ponds, a kettle lake formed 13,000 to 14,000 years ago. Mono Cliffs is home to white tail deer, great blue herons, black and mallard ducks, turkey vultures. Enjoy the impressive display of 30 metre high dolomite cliffs with crevice caves, rock fissures and chimneys.

Directions & Parking

Take Hwy 10 north, past Orangeville to the flashing amber light at County Rd 8. Turn right, travel approx 6 km to the hamlet of



Mono Centre. Enter the park through the old parking lot on the north side or continue on Rd 8 for 3 km turn left on 3rd line EHS, go 1 km, parking on the left.

Bruce Trail Reference Guide
Map #19

The Grotto

Kid Impressive Feature

Climbing up and down The Chimney will give you the amazing experience of going from the very top of the Niagara Escarpment down to the Georgian Bay shoreline. Must be able to scramble through and up and down the chimney - must be accompanied by an adult for chimney climbing and shoreline exploration. Suitable for children 8 and older.

Directions & Parking

Highway 6 to Bruce Peninsula National Park. Enter the park (there is a fee) and park at the "Head of Trails". A large map shows the different trails that can be taken to reach the Grotto.

Bruce Trail Reference Guide Map #40

Special Note: Stay tuned to the Peninsula Bruce Trail Club Website www.pbtc.ca for further information on family friendly activities during our Bruce Peninsula Hiking Festival.

