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Canadian
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Children Need To Be Active Today To Ensure A Healthy Tomorrow

Canada's physiotherapists are sounding the alarm that the growing epidemic of childhood obesity will result in a new generation of Canadians who will develop ongoing health problems and chronic disorders.

Members of the **Canadian Physiotherapy Association** are advising parents and teachers to encourage children to spend more time on physical activities to avoid many of the long term health issues linked to obesity in older Canadians. Along with increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and other medical disorders, obese people can develop musculoskeletal problems as a result of their increased body weight. Excess weight puts stress on the major weight-bearing joints, such as the hips, knees, spine and ankles. Over time, this can lead to soft tissue injuries, arthritis, and other painful joint disorders.

The request coincides with **International Walk to School Week**, October 3 – 7, 2005.

"Many musculoskeletal conditions seen in the youth population often are a direct cause of obesity and/or a deconditioned musculoskeletal system," says Canadian Physiotherapy Association member **Lia Arniel**, of XCEL Sport & Fitness 4Kids. "As primary health practitioners, physiotherapists are keenly aware of the extent of overweight and obese youth today, and regularly treat youth with injuries and/or disease directly related to or as a result of obesity."

A 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) reported that obesity rates in children have increased substantially during the past 25 years. In that time it has grown from three percent in 1978/79 to eight percent in 2004, or an estimated 500,000 young people¹. The biggest increases are among teens aged 12 to 17 – hooked on computers, video games and television – where the rate of obesity tripled to nine percent.

This upturn among adolescents is of particular concern because overweight or obese conditions in adolescence often persist into adulthood.

¹ The 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey: Nutrition (CCHS) collected information from over 35,000 respondents between January and December of 2004, and directly measured most respondents' height and weight. As a result, it is now possible to draw a more accurate picture of the prevalence of overweight and obesity in Canada.

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REDÉCOUVREZ LE MOUVEMENT.



There is no easy solution to this problem, but activity plays an important role in weight loss. For example, increasing activity will improve the ratio between energy consumed and energy burned. It doesn't take much to gain weight – an extra 48 calories a day (2/3 can of pop) can add up to a weight gain of five pounds a year. However, losing one pound (.454 kg) means burning 3,500 calories. Becoming more active, along with improving dietary habits, will help burn calories and reduce weight as well as improve both flexibility and muscle strength.

According to Healthy Active Kids Canada (HAKC), less than half of kids in Canada are expending the energy required to maintain a healthy weight and to develop healthy hearts, lungs, muscles and bones. HAKC recently issued the first annual report card on physical activity for children and youth that outlined alarming statistics:

- On average, only 43 percent of parents are regularly active with their children;
- Half of our kids are spending two or more hours a day watching TV, and they rank among the highest in the world for computer time;
- The prevalence of obesity in Canadian children has increased from two percent in 1981 to 10 percent in 2001.

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) supports the promotion of an active lifestyle and a fitter, more active population. Investing in the health of children will pay dividends in the future, with the benefits lasting well into adulthood. CPA recommends a minimum of 30 – 60 minutes of daily activity interspersed throughout the day, to achieve and maintain mobility and develop a healthier physique. CPA supports parents and teachers in encouraging children and youth to 'get moving' with activities that are enjoyable, like baseball, bike riding, swimming, ice skating, soccer and other sports.

Where appropriate, a physiotherapist will devise an exercise or activity program for an obese child that is suitable for his or her specific needs. A monitored program may begin with non-weight-bearing exercise, such as swimming or cycling, to minimize the impact on joints and increased gradually throughout the program. It will also include stretching to increase flexibility, and education about injury prevention.

Physiotherapists are health care professionals dedicated to enhancing and restoring mobility. Physiotherapy's unique contribution to health care stems from its advanced understanding of how the body moves, what keeps it from moving well and how to restore mobility.

CPA is the voluntary organization representing 10,000 members and students across the country. CPA's mission is to provide leadership and direction to the physiotherapy profession, foster excellence in practice, education and research and promote high standards of health in Canada.

The public can visit the Canadian Physiotherapy Association web site at www.physiotherapy.ca to find more information on physiotherapy and to access the "Find A Physiotherapist" directory. The CPA web site also links to resources for finding physiotherapists through provincial association branches and regulatory colleges.

- 30 -

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