



BREASTFEEDING

FIRST among 5 strategies to reduce OBESITY

Report: Improving the Health of Canadians

Improving the Health of Canadians is the first in a biennial report series produced by the Canadian Population Health Initiative. It examines what we know about factors that affect the health of Canadians, ways to improve our health and the implications of policy choices on health. It builds on earlier reports on the health of Canadians from the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health. The 2004 Report explores in-depth four key issues: income, early childhood development, Aboriginal Peoples' health and obesity.

FROM SUMMARY REPORT:

"Based on a synthesis of evidence from various sources, five strategies appear to be effective in preventing obesity, either by increasing physical activity or by improving diet or both.

1. Encouraging Breastfeeding

Research supports the importance of healthy infant nutrition in preventing many chronic diseases. There is increasing evidence to suggest that a lower risk of developing obesity may be directly related to the length of "exclusive" breastfeeding (that is, infant nourishment exclusively from breast milk), although this effect may not be apparent until later in childhood.

In Canada, in 1996–1997, 78% of women reported initiating breastfeeding. Breastfeeding initiation rates vary from a low of 53% in the Atlantic provinces to a high of 87% in British Columbia. Younger mothers, single mothers and mothers with lower levels of education and income tend to have lower rates of breastfeeding.

Although Canadian rates of breastfeeding are slowly increasing, the average duration of a few weeks is far from the six months or more that is recommended as optimal. For example, about 40% of mothers who breastfed reported doing so for less than three months. While breastfeeding initiation rates have been documented in Canada, the rates and duration of exclusive breastfeeding are not known. In one study in Quebec, in 1998, only 6% of the children were exclusively breastfed at four months of age. In the US, in

1998, 10% of the children were exclusively breastfed at six months of age. In 1993, Sweden compared favourably among western countries with an exclusive breastfeeding rate of 61% for infants up to four months of age.

Interventions to promote exclusive breastfeeding of infants can be targeted at individuals (with, for example, pre and post-natal counselling and coaching), home and family (through education and support) and communities (with dedicated breastfeeding areas, peer support groups, etc). Public health professionals and health care providers can play an important role in ongoing efforts to promote breastfeeding, but employers, businesses and local governments can also contribute to creating environments that encourage and support breastfeeding.

Enhancing public health infrastructure could improve coordination of comprehensive, intersectoral efforts to promote breastfeeding.

Other strategies listed are:

2. Reducing television viewing time
3. Promoting regular physical education
4. Implementing comprehensive school health programs
5. Implementing community-wide programs.

Evidence-Based Strategies for Population-Based Actions to Reduce Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breastfeeding (growing evidence)• Regular physical education (strong and growing evidence)• Reducing television viewing time (growing evidence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive school health programs (strong evidence)• Community wide interventions (strong evidence)
---	---	---

For the full report, go to:

http://www.cihi.com/cihiweb/dispPage.jsp?cw_page=PG_39_E&cw_topic=39&cw_rel=AR_322_E

Date Published: Feb 25, 2004
Pages: 173
ISBN: 1-55392-325-1 (Paper)
ISBN: 1-55392-363-4 (PDF)

See Summary Report, Chapter 5: OBESITY

Breastfeeding is listed FIRST among 5 strategies to reduce obesity.