

“Eat Less, Eat Better” ...is it that simple?

Rethinking Our Message About Healthy Eating and Obesity

4.28.2015 | Toronto | Westin Harbor Castle

Conference eBook

Partners



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Cancer Care Ontario
Action Cancer Ontario

The Nutrition Resource Centre is funded





This eBook summarizes the program, recordings, and key takeaways from the NRC's 2015 Forum: ***"Eat Less, Eat Better"...Is It That Simple? Rethinking Our Obesity Message"***

Over **180** participants joined the NRC for a day of thought-provoking presentations and engagement with leading experts.

Messages from the media, industry, government, and even some health professionals suggest that obesity can be prevented by simply eating less, eating better, and moving more. This reinforces the idea that obesity is a matter of lifestyle choices and personal responsibility.

The Ontario Public Health Association's Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) decided that it was time to ask: : is obesity prevention really that simple? What about the role of the food environment and social determinants of health? Are current messages about obesity actually effective? Is it as easy as "eat less, eat better"?

The NRC developed a one-day forum to bring together health promotion and nutrition professionals to answer some of these important questions. Our participants were challenged to critically rethink conventional approaches to healthy eating and obesity messaging.

Let's keep this important conversation going!

Organization

Partners



Sponsor



Exhibitors



Steering Committee

Christina Seely

Clinic Dietitian, Parkwood Institute - Mental Health Care

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Program Coordinator, Nutrition Resource Centre

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Assistant Professor, Ryerson University

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Stefani Margulies

Team Lead, Events, Public Health Ontario

Tamar Meyer

Manager, CAMH Health Promotion Resource Centre

Ximena Ramos-Salas

Managing Director, Canadian Obesity Network

Schedule

8:00 – 8:30 am	Registration and breakfast
8:30 – 8:45 am	Welcome
8:45 – 9:20 am	<i>Implications of obesity as a chronic disease for public health obesity messages</i>
9:30 – 10:40 am	<i>Healthy eating in a challenging food environment: What should be our message about personal responsibility?</i>
10:40 – 11:00 am	Break & Exhibits
11:00 – 11:50 am	<i>Can obesity be benign? Exploring the implications of metabolically healthy obesity for obesity messaging</i>
	<i>Eat less, eat better....What does that mean to the public?</i>
11:50 – 12:45 pm	Lunch & Exhibits
12:45 – 1:40 pm	<i>Cultural diversity, healthy eating, and obesity: Do we need to rethink our approach?</i>
	<i>Food addiction and public health messaging: What have we been missing?</i>
1:50 – 2:15 pm	<i>Motivating or stigmatizing? Understanding the public's perception of obesity-related health messages</i>
2:15 – 2:30 pm	Break & Exhibits
2:30 – 3:00 pm	<i>Finding the right words for health promotion and obesity intervention</i>
3:10 – 4:10 pm	<i>Social determinants of healthy eating and obesity: Why it's not as simple as "eat less, eat better"</i>
4:10 – 4:20 pm	Closing thoughts and reflections
5:30 – 7:30 pm	<i>OPHA 2015 Spring Networking Soiree</i>

Presentations



Arya Sharma PhD MD FRCPC

Chair for Obesity Research and Management, University of Alberta; Medical Director, Weight Wise; Scientific Director, Canadian Obesity Network

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Implications of obesity as a chronic disease for public health obesity messages

KEYNOTE

Popular discourse in the public, media, and even experts is dominated by the idea that obesity is simply a consequence of unhealthy behaviors – eating too much high calorie processed foods coupled with physical inactivity. Public health messages and interventions often reflect this view of obesity. However, growing evidence suggests obesity is a chronic condition with a complex etiology involving bio-psycho-social factors. This opening session explored why the topic of obesity messaging is timely and important, and how recognizing obesity as a chronic disease shifts public health messages and obesity-prevention efforts.

Key points

- Obesity is a complex chronic disease
- Simplistic messages are misleading and can promote unhealthy weight obsession, bias and discrimination
- Prevention should focus on improving health behaviors, not weight



Leia Minaker PhD

Scientist, Propel Centre for Population Impact

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#)

Selena Ortiz PhD MPH

RWJ Health and Society Scholar, Harvard University

[Audio](#)

Jacquie Reeds, MSc, RD

Clinical Dietitian, Hamilton Family Health Team and North Hamilton Community Health Centre

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#)

Healthy eating in a challenging food environment: What should be our message about personal responsibility?

Although the public health community recognizes the critical role of the food environment on food choices, the obesity discourse in the media, among policy makers, and the wider public continues to be dominated by an individualistic, personal responsibility frame. This session presented the current scientific evidence for the food environment's role in obesity and explored how this evidence should inform the use of the personal responsibility and environmental frames in public health. The session also explored how to effectively promote healthy eating behaviors in a challenging food environment.

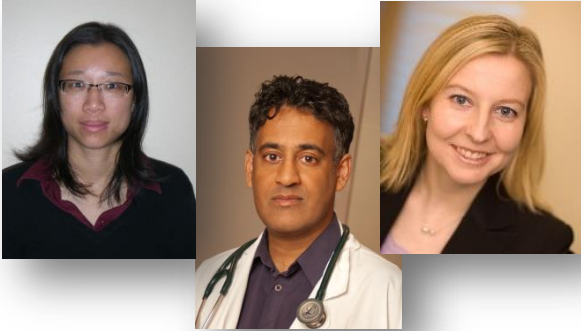
Key points

- Whether we see obesity as a matter of environment or personal choice depends on our frames
- Personal responsibility vs environmental frames is a false dichotomy. Alternative frames includes the taste-engineering frame
- Policies to address obesity should correspond with the frame used to describe obesity
- The lack of healthy food environments makes it difficult to study the association between food environment, diet, and health



Want to learn more? [Check out NRC's 2015 Food Environment Workshop!](#)

Presentations



Jennifer Kuk PhD
Associate Professor, York University

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Ravi Retnakaran MD MSc , FRCPC
Leadership Sinai Centre for Diabetes

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Veronica Kacinik MSc , RD
Clinic Dietitian, Medical Weight Management Centre

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Can obesity be benign? Exploring the implications of metabolically healthy obesity for obesity messaging

Recent attention among health professionals, scientists, and the media has focused on metabolically healthy obesity, a condition characterized by excess body fat with normal metabolic profile. Although many studies suggest metabolically healthy obesity protects against elevated risk for cardiovascular disease, mortality, and other metabolic abnormalities, recent studies suggest healthy obesity may not be a benign condition at all. This has left many people – professionals and the public alike – confused. This session brought together leading researchers and clinicians to clarify the latest science on metabolically healthy obesity and explore the implications for obesity-prevention messages.

Key points

- A lack of consensus definition for “metabolically healthy” makes it challenging to interpret scientific literature on metabolically healthy obesity
- It is unclear whether there are enough people with metabolically healthy obesity to warrant change in current guidelines
- Metabolically healthy obesity may be a transient condition associated with increased risk for death, cardiovascular events, and incident development of type 2 diabetes compared to metabolically healthy normal weight
- Health messages should be framed positively



Laura Pasut MSc, MBA, RD
Director of Nutrition, Canadian Sugar Institute

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Sue Mah MHSc, RD
President, Nutrition Solutions Inc.

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Eat less, eat better....What does that mean to the public?

An accurate understanding of the public's beliefs, attitudes, and practices is needed to effectively promote healthy eating and prevent obesity. This session highlighted research on the public's beliefs and behaviors related to healthy eating body weight. Implications for the promotion of healthy eating and prevention of obesity were also discussed.

Key points

- The public under-estimates the calorie content in food
- Health messages should not focus on just one nutrient or food
- Cooking, eating together, and enjoying food is an important public message
- Positive messages may be more effective with the public than negative messages
- Champions for healthy eating can include government, health leaders, industry, NGOs, public health leaders, grocers, chefs, foodies, home economists, dietitians

Presentations



Rhona Hanning PhD, RD
Professor, School of Public Health and Health Systems,
University of Waterloo

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Jennifer Atkins RD, MPH
Registered Dietitian, Access Alliance Community Health
Centre

Yousra Dabbouk RD, MPH
Registered Dietitian, Access Alliance Community Health
Centre

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Cultural diversity, healthy eating and obesity: do we need to rethink our approach?

Ontario has one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse populations in the world. Although this diversity may represent distinct understandings of healthy body weight, body image, and eating practices, cultural stereotypes persist that may hinder efforts to promote healthy eating. This session critically re-examined common misperceptions and approaches to promoting and prioritizing healthy eating and body weight among a diverse population, with a focus on First Nations and Newcomer populations.

Key points

- Key message should be achieving health, regardless of size
- Many weight-related issues prevalent among the general public also occur in Aboriginal people
- Messages should respect historical and environmental contexts affecting Aboriginal people
- Newcomers are not a homogeneous group. Therefore “one-size-fits-all” approaches do not work
- Cultural competence around obesity messaging should emphasize responsiveness and communication with newcomers



Vera Tarman MD, MSc., FCFP, ABAM
Medical Director, Renascent

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Food addiction and public health obesity messaging: what have we been missing ?

An increasingly influential model of obesity is the food addiction model which posits that food addiction may be causally linked to obesity in certain populations. Recent evidence shows that presenting food addiction as one important contributor to rising obesity rates may reduce public stigma. However, the food addiction model remains highly controversial due to resistance from many experts in the nutritional and medical fields, as well as the food industry. This session shared the current science on food addiction, particularly as a contributor to obesity, and how the food addiction model can reduce obesity-related stigma.

Key points

- Current science on food addiction is preliminary and anecdotal
- Acknowledging food addiction may decrease stigma
- Food addiction can be stronger than many drug addictions
- A message of everything in moderation is ineffective for people with food addiction

Presentations



Ximena Ramos-Salas MSc PhD(c),
Managing Director, Canadian Obesity Network

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#)



Check out these related links!

[Weight bias and stigma.](#)(Rudd Centre for Food Policy and Obesity)

[Public reaction to obesity-related health campaigns](#)

[Position statement on body shaming and weight prejudice](#) (Academy for Eating Disorders)

Motivating or stigmatizing? Understanding the public's perception of obesity-related health messages

Widespread concerns about the obesity epidemic, particularly among children, have been the driver for the creation of a multitude of obesity-related public health campaigns. Most predominantly, these campaigns have focused on promoting healthy eating and physical activity as a way to achieving healthy weights. Public health research has shown that a focus on individual-based behaviour change can have unintended consequences for certain populations. This session explored the public's (including people with obesity) perception of common obesity narratives and provided recommendations on how prevention strategies can avoid promoting stigma and weight bias.

Key points

- Common public health messages about “healthy weights” may be overly simplistic, and promote weight bias and stigma
- Positive messages emphasizing healthy behaviors are more effective with the public, including people with obesity, than messages implying individual responsibility
- People with obesity should be engaged in the development of public health obesity strategies
- Obesity messages should focus on health and be targeted to the entire population



Ingrid Tyler MD

Assistant Professor, Clinical Public Health, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Lesley Andrade MHS, RD

Public Health Nutritionist, Sudbury and District Health Unit

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Kim Ouellette RD

Niagara Region Public Health

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Social determinants of healthy eating and obesity: Why it's not as simple as “eat less, eat better”

Healthy eating is much more complicated than personal choices. Factors such as income, cost of food, education, and social context also structure food choices. Understanding the multiple contexts and social determinants influencing healthy eating provides insights on how to effectively promote healthy eating and prevent obesity. In this session, participants learned about the social determinants of healthy eating and obesity, and how these mediate the impact of health-related communications.

Key points

- Considering health equity, particularly through health equity impact assessments, can help identify unintended positive or negative impacts on health equity of obesity-related policies, programs, and interventions
- A holistic, health – centered approach, that recognizes that health is influenced by the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental factors, is effective for obesity prevention
- The ecological model of obesity recognizes obesity as a natural response to obesogenic environment
- Improving environments is effective for improving population health status, including weight
- The hybrid, non-dieting paradigms approach includes improving health behaviors at the individual level and addressing upstream determinants of psychological and physical health

Presentations



Ted Kyle RPh MBA
Founder, ConscienHealth

[Audio](#) | [Slides](#) | [Video](#)

Finding the right words for obesity prevention

People-first language describes what a person has (person with obesity), not what a person is (obese person). Although people-first language has been widely adopted for most chronic diseases, it has not been widely adopted for obesity despite growing evidence that using people-first language reduces stigma and fosters positive attitudes and behaviors. There is also an ongoing controversy about using the word "obesity". While some argue for discarding the term altogether because of its stigmatizing connotations, others argue that using the term provides clarity. This session explored the importance of using people-first language and provided an informed perspective on using the word "obesity" in obesity prevention messaging.

Key points

- Using people-first language can help reduce obesity stigma and bias, and promotes enhanced engagement with people with obesity
- Framing obesity as a choice promotes negative weight bias
- A "healthy weights" message may overlook the reality that health occurs at many body sizes and shapes
- Eliminating the word "obesity" will not reduce stigma; using respectful language will



What's Next?

We Want to Keep the Conversation Going!

Stay tuned to our newsletter and website for information about upcoming events related to this important topic, including:

- An expert-led Tweet chat about the **portrayal of obesity in the media**
- A webinar on **dichotomous language in the obesity discourse**
- A webinar featuring **people with obesity sharing how they perceive obesity-related public health messages**

...and many more! Have questions or suggestions? [**Contact us!**](#)



Sneak Peek: Keep your eyes open for announcements about next year's Forum, which will focus on the **Food Environment!**

What We Heard

Here is some of the **feedback** that we received on Twitter (#nrc2015) just after the Forum :

- "...Great learning at #nrc2015 yesterday! It's more challenging than "eat less, eat better." Reflecting on how to craft helpful messages..."
- "...Great day at NRC's "'Eat Less, Eat Better'...Is it really that simple?" Short answer: no. Fantastic speakers/insights/perspectives..."
- "...Thanks for inviting me to be a speaker at the event! A fabulous event for all! ..."

You can also take a moment to read these **guest posts on our [blog](#)** about the Forum:

- Guest Post from Michelle Saraiva (RD, MAN, cofounder of GetReal Gurls Nutrition): ["Eat Less, Move More...Is It That Simple?"](#)
- Guest Post by Ted Kyle (founder of ConscienHealth and one of the speakers at the Forum) : ["Public Health without Private Harm"](#)
- Guest Post from Heather Thomas (RD, Public Health Dietitian at the Middlesex-London Health Unit): ["What I Learned at "Eat Less, Eat Better ..is it that simple?"](#)

Stay Engaged!

To promote our Forum, the NRC made a **short video** – you can view it [here](#)!

Stay tuned to our **News in Brief** and **monthly newsletter** to hear about all of our upcoming events!

The NRC (@nutritionrc) tweeted throughout the Forum using #nrc2015 to discuss and share with those not in the room. A detailed summary of our online conversation can be found [here](#)!



The Nutrition Resource Centre has just launched the [NRC Navigator](#)! This is a **free online tool** for health promotion professionals and community partners involved in **healthy eating and nutrition** across the health continuum. We hope that it will become a valuable resource to those involved in program and policy development. When creating this resource, the NRC's main objectives were to:

- Provide centralized access to the best available evidence in healthy eating and nutrition promotion, in select topic areas as identified by stakeholders
- Direct health promotion professionals to existing examples of programs and policies (at the local, national and international level)
- Direct health promotion professionals to resources and tools that can be used to adapt and implement programs and policies in their respective communities
- Encourage communication and collaboration by providing opportunities to submit, share and discuss content

The NRC Navigator can be found under the "[NRC Navigator](#)" tab of the [NRC website](#). With the NRC Navigator, users will be able to:

- find resources by using the tool's detailed filters and its powerful search field;
- create and email themselves a "My Resources" list;
- share links to resources via social media channels;
- discuss resources by sharing their comments; and
- submit a resource for potential inclusion using a simple, online form

Initially, resources on the site will include previously vetted programs and policy development resources, mainly focused on child nutrition. Next, we will add content to the NRC Navigator based on the priority topics that have been identified by our stakeholders. As the NRC Navigator grows, we will look for resources that have not previously been vetted, and will post our inclusion criteria for new resources that are added.

We want to hear your thoughts - tweet us @nutritionrc using the hashtag #nrnav or email navigator@opha.on.ca. We value your comments and questions about the NRC Navigator.

Stay connected!



events@opha.on.ca



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#nrc_obesitymsg



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