

## GETTING KIDS

# *to eat at least five fruit and vegetable servings per day and to cut down on fast foods*

Young people should eat at least five fruit and vegetable servings a day, but this is not the case for over half of those aged 4 to 18 years. In some regions, the proportion of youth who eat the recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables is virtually nil, which demonstrates the impact of the local environment on their food choices.

### WHY TAKE ACTION?

Because fruits and vegetables are **essential** for the proper functioning of the body and for the **healthy development** of young people! When eaten in sufficient quantities, they can reduce the risk of chronic diseases and conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity and diabetes.

#### **Because foods from fast-food outlets can be harmful to health**

Close to 50% of youth aged 6 to 16 years occasionally eat these types of foods (once or twice a week). Approximately 10% regularly eat fast foods (three times a week or more), and this percentage increases during adolescence. The situation is a cause for concern. Fast food poses health risks, because it contains excess calories, fat and sugar, and is generally accompanied by sugar-sweetened beverages. It is also associated with a low consumption of fruits, vegetables, fibre and milk.

### MANY FACTORS INFLUENCE YOUNG PEOPLE'S FOOD CHOICES

Factors that discourage youth from eating fruits and vegetables:

- **Taste:** unfortunately, young people seem to have an innate preference for sweet, salty and high-fat foods;
- **Quality:** of available fruits and vegetables;
- **Easy access to junk food.**

One out of every four Canadian households does not have easy access to supermarkets selling fresh produce. Close to 50% of Quebecers say too many fast-food restaurants do not offer "healthy choices," and restaurants do not have enough fruit- and vegetable-based dishes. The high cost of fresh produce prevents approximately 40% of Quebecers from having a healthy diet. This barrier is most likely to be encountered by people with low incomes and those living in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

Factors promoting the consumption of junk food:

- **Taste:** the perception that junk food tastes "better" than healthy foods;
- **Easy access:** geographic and economic.

In Quebec, there is a fast-food restaurant within a 10- to 15-minute walk of a third of all schools. The proportion is even greater for high schools and in low-income areas. In urban settings, one is 30 times more likely to see fast-food restaurants near high schools in underprivileged neighbourhoods. The situation is alarming.



## EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

### DAYCARES AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

- Train educators to get the right message across, organize fun educational activities, and become healthy eating role models.
- Make sure that fruits and vegetables feature prominently on the menu.
- Regularly offer fun educational activities to encourage children to eat fruits and vegetables.

### SCHOOLS AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Ensure that the Going the Healthy Route at School framework policy is applied.
- Train teachers and facilitators to get the right message across, organize fun educational activities, and become healthy eating role models.
- Provide healthy eating workshops.

### COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

- Develop policies and measures to increase healthy food offerings and limit junk food.
- Train facilitators to get the right message across, organize fun educational activities, and become healthy eating role models.
- Offer educational activities on healthy eating, with a focus on fruits and vegetables.

### MUNICIPALITIES

- Develop policies and measures aimed at improving food offerings in municipal organizations and at events by providing more fruits and vegetables and limiting junk food.
- Incorporate short distribution channels, agri-tourism routes, etc. into regional and urban development plans.
- Review zoning regulations to limit and regulate the number of fast-food outlets near schools.
- Use zoning regulations to limit billboard ads featuring junk food.
- Reserve or protect areas of land for community gardens.
- Make sure residents have access to fresh produce outlets (public markets, farm stands, etc.).

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