



Canadian Stroke Network

Réseau canadien contre
les accidents cérébrovasculaires



News release: January 29, 2008

**Canada's "Salt Lick Award" goes
to A&W "Chubby Junior" Meal**
Parents urged to steer children from sodium-laden fast food

OTTAWA, Jan. 29—Three of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence – the Canadian Stroke Network, the Canadian Obesity Network and the Advanced Foods and Materials Network – today awarded the first national "Salt Lick Award" to the A&W "Chubby Junior" Kids' Meal, which contains 1,910 milligrams of sodium – 710 mg more than the recommended total daily intake for four- to eight-year-olds.

A scan of the nutritional information for kids' menus at popular fast-food chains shows that "Chubby Junior" Kids' Meal is an excessively salty meal deal among a fast-food field of sodium-laden, fatty, calorie-rich foods. The meal includes two Chubby chicken pieces and fries.

"Parents should be concerned about the sodium in their children's diets," says Dr. Antoine Hakim of the Canadian Stroke Network. "Salty diets are raising children's blood pressure and taking them down a path towards stroke and heart disease in adulthood." Burgers, pizza and submarine sandwiches represent a leading source of total sodium consumption.

Recommended sodium intake for children is 1,000 mg a day for one- to three-year-olds; 1,200 mg a day for four- to eight-year-olds; and 1,500 mg a day for children age nine and over.

The three national networks are calling for increased awareness of the impact of high-sodium foods and the need to reduce the sodium content of processed and fast foods, particularly those aimed at children. Many fast-food restaurants also attract children to these high-sodium foods with toys, contests and birthday clubs.

High sodium consumption can exacerbate the already dangerous complications associated with obesity, according to Dr. Arya Sharma of the Canadian Obesity Network. "Obese people are extremely sodium-sensitive, meaning they tend to retain more fluids and experience higher blood pressure increases in response to significant salt consumption compared with normal-weight individuals," Dr. Sharma explains. "The fact that many high-salt fast foods tend to be higher in total fat and calories also exacerbates health issues."

Currently, more than 12 million Canadians are overweight. A further five million Canadian adults are obese, as are 500,000 children. According to the 2004 *Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS): Nutrition*, one quarter of Canadians reported that on the day before being interviewed they consumed something that had been prepared in a fast-food outlet. Among 14- to 18-year-olds, the figure is one-third, and 19% for children aged four to eight.

The “Salt Lick” award coincides with World Salt Awareness Week, which involves 18 countries, including Canada, the UK, Australia, Bangladesh, Sweden, Poland, Barbados, Georgia, Israel, Slovenia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Finland, Slovakia, Portugal, Turkey, the U.S., India and Pakistan.

“Keeping children’s salt consumption below the recommended limits is vital,” says Dr. Graham MacGregor, who heads up the UK-based World Action on Salt and Health (WASH). “Research published just last year showed that children who eat higher salt diets have higher levels of blood pressure than children who eat less salt. It is also well established that blood pressure tracks in children. That is, the higher the blood pressure in childhood, the higher the blood pressure in adulthood.”

“In order to decrease their dietary sodium intake, Canadians need healthier, but still convenient, alternatives,” notes the Advanced Foods and Materials Network’s Scientific Director Dr. Rickey Yada. “Fast food companies need healthier menu options and grocery store shelves need healthier products. Our researchers are working to identify and help develop healthier ingredients, make them available to food companies and, ultimately, to the consumer. Choices need to be available and, in turn, Canadians need to make smart choices.”

This week, WASH is highlighting high-sodium foods marketed at children in the U.K. Here are some examples of high-sodium foods for children in Canada, based on nutritional data posted on corporate websites by the food companies themselves and accessed on Jan. 23, 2008. Data does not include condiments or desserts that often come with the meals:

- A Bacon Double Cheeseburger Quesadilla with fries off the Kids Menu at Boston Pizza contains 1,720 mg of sodium. Add an Orange Iceberg drink (170 mg) and the total is 1,890 mg.
- A Harvey’s Hamburger Kids Meal contains 1,485 mg of sodium, including the burger, fries and drink. The website states that the Cheeseburger Meal contains 2,145 mg of sodium, however Harvey’s Restaurants indicates that the information they have posted on their site is incorrect and it contains 1,580.
- A Grilled Cheese Sandwich from the Kids Menu at Swiss Chalet contains 1,120 mg of sodium. With Fresh Cut Fries (45 mg) and bottomless beverage (sodium content unclear), the total is more than 1,165.
- A Junior Cheeseburger Deluxe at Wendy’s has 690 mg of sodium. Add the Wendy’s Kids Meal French Fries (270 mg) and a Frosty Junior (90 mg) and a small child is getting 1,050 mg of sodium in a single sitting.
- An Original Whopper Junior Sandwich with Cheese at Burger King contains 700 mg of sodium. Add a Kids French Fries (240 mg) and a Kids Root Beer (25 mg) and the grand total is 965 mg of sodium.
- A Junior Chicken Sandwich at McDonald’s has 760 mg of sodium. Add a small fries (180 mg) and Childs Root Beer (25 mg) and the total is 965 mg of sodium.

According to the CCHS, more than 80 per cent of 1-8 year olds consume far beyond the recommended daily upper limit of sodium. Children ages 1 to 3 averaged close to 2,000 mg a day, while four-to-eight-year-olds had an average daily intake of 2,700.

About the Canadian Stroke Network (www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca)

The Canadian Stroke Network includes more than 100 of Canada's leading scientists and clinicians from 24 universities who work collaboratively on various aspects of stroke. The Network, which is headquartered at the University of Ottawa, also includes partners from industry, the non-profit sector, provincial and federal governments. The Canadian Stroke Network, one of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence, is committed to reducing the physical, social and economic impact of stroke on the lives of individual Canadians and on society as a whole.

About the Canadian Obesity Network (www.obesitynetwork.ca)

The Canadian Obesity Network (CON) links obesity researchers with practitioners, policymakers, and the private sector to foster cost-effective solutions to prevent, control and treat obesity. CON boasts more than 2,500 professional members across Canada.

About the Advanced Foods and Materials Network (www.afmnet.ca)

The Advanced Foods & Materials Network (AFMNet), one of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence, is a nationwide initiative that brings together researchers in biochemistry, engineering, health, law and society focused on innovative aspects of food & materials including developing new functional foods and evaluating the perceptions and impact of Natural Health Product Regulations. Collaboration and networking are key for AFMNet: Over 100 researchers at 21 universities help identify gaps in existing research capacity and support the training of highly qualified individuals destined to become leaders in industry, academia and government. Together, AFMNet is increasing innovation and enhancing competitiveness for Canada.

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