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Practice

EXPLORING MEMBERS' PRACTICE ISSUES

Practice is a quarterly update service from Dietitians of Canada. *Practice* includes information on scientific and clinical developments and Canadian dietitians' experiences and challenges in practice. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not imply policy of the Association unless so stated. Articles are not peer-reviewed.

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Please forward submissions, suggestions and comments to the Coordinator:
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Working Together in BC to Promote Eating Together

Eating together is a deeply held value across income levels and cultures. This article focuses on the action we are taking to promote eating together among British Columbians, and describes our experiences using open space technology.

People seem to know instinctively that eating together is a good thing – good for health, for communication and for social bonding. As a recent guest on an open-line radio show, callers reinforced this message; men and women, young and old, new immigrants and Canadians hailing from all around the world called to talk about how important eating together was for them.

Meeting planning: toward a collaborative approach

Dietitians and nutritionists in BC have been hungering to do an *Eat Together* campaign since we learned of the success of the campaign conducted by US colleagues. The literature supports eating together as beneficial for children, youth and older adults. With the support of the BC Ministry of Health, the BC Dairy Foundation held a special provincial meeting to lay the groundwork to move the initiative forward in BC. Based on the evidence that eating together benefits nutrition, education and social adjustment, we wanted to include experts in all these areas and from all regions in BC. It became a challenge to limit the list that included community nutritionists, community kitchen coordinators, tobacco reduction workers, school superintendents, administrators and teachers, representatives from parent, pregnancy outreach, aboriginal and various ethno-cultural groups, policy experts, early childhood and healthy aging specialists, marketing and communication experts

and provincial level family and health representatives.

We invited approximately 50 individuals from around the province to attend a one-day, facilitated meeting to see how we could work collaboratively. Travel bursaries were arranged as needed to ensure provincial representation. To prepare for the meeting, we asked invitees to complete an online survey about current work on *Eating Together* and with whom or how people thought we could work on the initiative. Results were shared in advance of the meeting. I was delighted with how easy it was to use SurveyMonkey™; the findings gave us a big head start on the meeting.

Areas of interest identified

The diversity of people represented was a recipe for deep and thoughtful discussion. The contracted facilitator made use of full group, round-table discussion and “open space technology” designed so that all voices could be heard in the short time available. Open

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Top Five Common Diet Questions: The Next Generation

Spreading the goodness of nutrition is my passion. As the founder of the most visited (over 350,000 monthly readers) online nutrition community run by registered dietitians, I receive a lot of diet-related questions from readers every day. Through the years I have clearly seen advancement in nutrition knowledge among the general public. A decade ago, readers asked about the health benefits of omega 3 and garlic. Now, questions are more in-depth and tend to fall into five main topic areas:

1. Is flax oil better than fish oil?

This is by far the most popular question. With the increasing popularity of vegetarian eating and mounting fears about mercury and PCBs in seafood, our clients often think that the vegetarian version of omega 3 from flax oil is superior to fish oil in heart health management. Although our bodies convert alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) into eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), the conversion rate is slow. In addition, flax oil contains a high concentration of ALA. Although still controversial, high intake of ALA has been linked to higher risk of prostate cancer. Until more is known, men are recommended to choose fish source for heart-healthy omega 3s instead of plant-sourced ALA.

2. Is (fill in the blank) more nutritious than white granulated sugar?

The blank can be honey, brown sugar, rock sugar, raw sugar, molasses, corn sugar, maple syrup, confectioner's sugar, cane sugar, evaporated cane juice, or any other sweetener. Some of the "natural" sugars are less processed and, hence, they retain a more robust flavour. Nutritionally, they are almost the same. They contain the same calories as white sugar and are metabolized the same way. Some natural sugars, such as honey and evaporated cane juice, contain minute amounts of minerals. Unless we eat a gigantic portion of these

"natural" sugars daily, the difference in mineral content is insignificant. One reader once asked about choosing a sweetened soy drink for someone with diabetes, believing that soy drinks sweetened with "natural" sugar were healthier. We suggest that clients focus on eating less sugar overall, rather than on the form of sugar on the ingredient list.

3. Is (fill in the blank) healthier than pop?

Again, the blank here could be diet pop, juice, energy drinks, milk, black tea, herbal tea, green tea, iced tea, sparkling water, tonic water, fruit smoothies, etc. Some drinks are marketed as energy boosters, mental boosters or calorie burners. The latest green tea buzz has confused the general public; when a new iced green tea was introduced last year, we received many questions about whether this was a pop or a tea. Some drinks are good thirst-quenchers, such as low-fat milk, unsweetened tea, natural juice and bottled water. However, most others contain hidden calories or are simply water with artificial colourings and flavourings.

4. Is one form of calcium supplement better than another?

Calcium supplements are available in numerous forms: pills, capsules, enteric-coated pills, powder, liquid or chewable. They may be synthetic, "natural from plant sources," "naturally occurring from oyster shell," or "natural from coral bed." In addition, they may be acidic, alkaline or neutral in pH. They may also be bundled with vitamin D, magnesium, vitamin K, glucosamine sulphate or more. No wonder people are confused! The No. 1 complaint about calcium supplements we receive is about pill size; generally, we find that clients are using large pills because they are choosing products that contain more than simply calcium. We may advise clients to revisit their

reasons for taking calcium supplements. If it is to supplement their diets with calcium, they ought to base their choice on the amount of elemental calcium. While added nutrients (especially vitamin D) may aid calcium absorption, it is important to determine whether the extra ingredients reduce the amount of elemental calcium or render them too big to swallow.

5. Is organic better?

The advantages of eating foods containing fewer chemicals, pesticides, and hormones are certainly appealing. A decade ago, *organic* was a term mostly associated with produce. This is no longer the case. Grocery aisles are filled with organic products as many packaged products have an organic version. Packaged products labelled *organic* are not always healthier, such as organic candy, organic chips, organic frozen pizza pockets or organic cola. In 2005, the organic industry reached \$3.1 billion in sales in Canada and is one of the fastest-growing categories in the food industry, growing at about 15 to 20% annually. We try to educate clients that overall food choice is more important, and that 3,000 calories from organic food is still 3,000 calories.

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Contributing to Practice

Have you considered contributing to *Practice* this way? Let me know if there are topics you'd like to know more about. I'll do my best to locate a writer or to ask a writer to elaborate on their topic in an upcoming issue.

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