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# Health campaign draws on parents

Families are being encouraged to get active after a survey finds a big gap between parents' beliefs and reality, KATIE STEWART reports.

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*'It's not that they're bad parents, they just don't know that they're part of the problem.'*  
DR. MARK TREMBLAY Director of the healthy active living and obesity research group at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario

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Most children in Eastern Ontario aren't nearly as healthy as their parents think, say a series of studies and surveys, a perception the local health authority hopes to change.

"If you look at the numbers, it's hard to believe we are this out of touch, but we are," said Dr. Mark Tremblay, director of the healthy active living and obesity research group at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

A survey done by the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network shows a big gap between parents' beliefs and the reality of their children's weight, physical activity and eating habits.

Fifty-six per cent of parents believe their children are very active; Active Healthy Kids Canada says that 87 per cent of children do not get enough physical activity.

Zero per cent of parents think their children are obese and seven per cent concede their children are overweight; Statistics Canada says 28 per cent of children in Ontario are overweight or obese.

Just 24 per cent of parents say their kids spend two hours or more a day in front of TVs or computers; the reality, says the cardiovascular disease network, is that more than 90 per cent of Canadian kids spend more than two hours in front of a screen each day.

Tremblay believes that this disconnect stems not only from parents wanting to see the best in their children, but also from a shift in what "normal" is.

"If the normal kid is a little bit heavier and their activity level is lower, we adjust to that," said Tremblay. "Inactivity started a movement that was fun. We all challenged each other to buy bigger TVs and spend more time in front of them, but now we've lost the balance. We need a re-calibration of that."

Eating too much and exercising too little are bad news for children's long-term heart health. So the cardiovascular disease prevention network is launching its first-ever health promotion campaign today.

The "Know More, Do More" campaign hopes to encourage parents to promote healthy eating and more physical activity for their children.

"Parents play a critical piece in this. We want to give them a reality check," said Tremblay.

"It's not that they're bad parents, they just don't know that they're part of the problem."

The campaign will encourage families to sign up and commit to taking steps to lead a healthier lifestyle while getting to spend quality time together.

"The whole goal of the campaign is to get families to be active, eat well, and do it in a fun and easy way," said Marie-Claude Turcotte, supervisor of the school-age health program with Ottawa Public Health. "Families can integrate these ideas into their lives without changing much of their daily routines."

A "Healthy Tips Jar" was created for families that provides suggestions of things they can do together, such as playing Frisbee in the park or cooking a healthy meal.

Andrea Tomkins, a well-known Ottawa writer and "mommyblogger" with two daughters, immediately agreed to participate in the challenge.

"As parents, it seems so overwhelming to try and manage these issues. But I really think we can do it, we just need to prioritize," said Tomkins. "We've created time to check e-mails and go shopping. But, we need to take a step back and say to ourselves, 'What baby steps can we take to make time for this?'"

"I'm intrigued to see if the study and the campaign will resonate with parents," said Tremblay.

"It's difficult to make a change if the majority of your target population doesn't think they're part of the problem."



Parents can learn more about the launch and the campaign by going to [www.knowmore-domore.ca](http://www.knowmore-domore.ca).

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