

The Epoch Times

Epoch Times International

< Back to previous page

Home > Opinion | Region: Canada

Improved but Still Flawed—Canada's New Food Guide

By Wahiba Chair

Special to The Epoch Times

Feb 18, 201

More than two thirds of Canadians are overweight, costing the country 7 billion dollars per year in direct health care and lost productivity. According to a World Health Organization recent report published on *Forbes* magazine this month, Canada ranks number 35 on the list of fattest countries in the world. Ideally, these scary numbers would have resulted in a beneficial makeover of the outdated, confusing and boring Canadian Food Guide whose lifetime, ironically, had lasted for the past fifteen years.

Unfortunately for us- The newly acclaimed so-called food bible serves more as a highly lobbied and forced bureaucracy than a real solution to a critical time-sensitive problem. In fact, the recommendations to get Canadians to eat better and feel healthier have been alleged by many experts to feed the obesity beast instead.

Two weeks ago, we witnessed the milestone scoop and yet more numbers behind the six-page "hard copy" making: four years of extensive revisions, 7000 experts and 1.5 million dollars of funding. Media figures rave and stakeholders applaud as Health Canada praises the highlights: culture savvy, interactive, and personalized.

I am sure Canadians would appreciate the efforts had they been of greater relevance towards preventing the skyrocketing epidemic their daily lives tangles with. Let's face it: The Canadian Food guide, with more than two million copies distributed every year, is the second-most-requested government publication in the country. Hospitals, schools, and nursing homes are mandated to follow it. Want it or not: any flaw will impact numerous lives at once.

Ironically, one will find no explicit mention of the obesity issue or calories within the guide even though those are listed first on Health Canada's own nutrition facts label. Instead, the guide focuses on recommended number of servings from each food category. The Canadian Medical Association condemns such negligence: "Canada's Food Guide is a nutrition resource, not an effective weight loss tool because it provides inadequate guidance on daily caloric intake,"

Health Canada, apparently, agrees by stressing the guide is intended to help people make healthy dietary choices instead. This slightly ambiguous definition could make room for many unwanted consequences such as weight gain. Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, medical director of the Bariatric Medical Institute in Ottawa, an outspoken

MEDIA CREATION
COMPETITION ON
IMMIGRATION &
CULTURAL DIVERSITY

What's your view
on immigration and
cultural diversity in
Canada?

Enter your short
film or podcast!

Over
\$25,000
PRIZES

RCI vivQ

Deadline for entries:
June 29th, 2007

... of the guide explains how Health Canada seems caught up in the flawed notion that "Healthy Eating" leads to "Healthy Weights" although these two concepts are mutually exclusive. Healthy eating involves the foods that you choose, while weight management involves the calories you input. According to his calculations, such negligence could lead a healthy weight person to gain as much as 70 lbs.

But one might wonder how such scary outcome could result from laudable personalization. "My Food Guide", the interactive Web Component calls for more confusion by only taking into account age, sex and food preferences. It does not take a rocket scientist to know that someone trying to lose weight should eat less than a person striving to maintain a healthy standard. Important factors such as fitness level, height, weight should also have been incorporated for proper tailoring.

To add fuel to fire, while the guide suggests to limit prepared processed foods like pastries, cakes, and sweetened beverages; it certainly does not address eating in fast food chains, and leaves the word "moderation" to the reader's own interpretation, as noted by Dr. Boisvert, education coordinator at the Merck Frost /CIHR research Chair on Obesity at Universite Laval. Interestingly enough, however, white bread, white rice, muffins and bagels are mentioned as grain alternatives

Now, if adding meat, dairy, and vegetable oils make your diet sound healthier - wait till you know why they were placed there in the first place. Clearly, Health Canada did not base the guide on pure scientific evidence, but rather on several stakeholders' hidden agendas. Think about it, by influencing what Canadians eat, the food guide also controls the industry making as Dr. Freedhoff explains "To invite the food industry into the creation of the food guide is just asking for trouble. It doesn't make good medical sense to include people with a vested interest in the recommendations." With all the same incentives in mind, Beef Information Centre, for instance, has pressed for more meats, whose over-consumption, in addition to caloric gaining and saturated fats have been linked with heart disease, and several cancers.

The Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council lobbied to ensure that the Food Guide doesn't specifically call out packaged and restaurant foods.

While childhood obesity rates have risen by 300% in the past 30 years, chocolate milk, whole milk and pudding serve as dairy alternatives. The infiltration of the BC Dairy Foundation is strikingly explicit. A study in International Journal of Cancer concluded that an increased dairy consumption was associated with increased risk of ovarian cancer. If Canadian's intake of Calcium and Vitamin D were truly the only concern in mind, then why not recommend a daily calorie-free risk-free supplement.

The Vegetable Oil Industry of Canada has managed to find a niche within Health Canada to stress unsaturated fats servings for Canadians with no account for calories. According to Dr. Freedhoff, the difficulty to use soft margarines low in trans fats, is also contradictory to Health Canada's own trans-fat task which calls for the elimination of trans-fat from our food supply. Dr. Boisvert also says he would have seen more limitations on saturated fat. The actual recommendations are 10% of caloric intake (20g a day on a 2000kcal diet) as shown on Nutrition facts Label.

Other important weak factors involve Vitamin D supplementation for everyone over age 50, which take into account the fact that this vitamin can also be generated by the body through exposure to sunlight. Vitamin B12 recommendations, on the other hand, were left out.

So, what is the solution? Let's take a look at what our neighbors, Americans, who rank number 9 on the *Forbes* poll, are doing. Despite their pyramid scheme vs. Canada's unanimous rainbow guide, the common issues are close enough to draw relevant comparisons.

After 2005's much controversy surrounding the new USDA food pyramid, the Harvard School of Public Health built the Healthy Eating Pyramid, that "emphasizes weight control through exercising daily and limiting excessive total intake of calories" says Walter C. Willett and Meir J. Stampfer, professors of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. Even though our government's cause was noble and put us ahead of the old Guide, by, for instance, emphasizing fruits and vegetables and physical activity, there is still much work to be done. In the meantime, Dr. Freedhoff recommends that Canadians use the more highly researched pyramid as a better and healthier alternative. If the genuine incentive be...

...side were to counterattack an unhealthy threatening trend, then it should be independent of industry lobbies whose incentives are purely monetary.

More information on Healthy Pyramid Guide can be found at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/pyramids.html>

Copyright 2000 - 2007 Epoch Times International