

YMCA program aimed at obesity

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Immigrant kids quickly pick up our language, lifestyle -- and bad eating habits.

So a new London-based program aims to prevent obesity among newcomers, especially low-income families.

Families in Action is organized by the YMCA of London and the Middlesex-London Health Unit.

Funded by a two-year \$100,000 grant from the Canadian Diabetes Association, it aims to help families with children ages six to 12 exercise and develop good eating habits.

"We already know that (obese) kids grow up to be fat adults," said Dr. Stuart Harris, professor at Western's Schulich School of Medicine.

Harris said he believes new immigrants, sometimes also low-income families, adopt bad Canadian eating habits and tend to eat low-cost fatty foods.

"Instead of just talking about the problem, we want to do something about it," he said.

The program offers family counselling, free food vouchers, healthy cooking classes and free YMCA family memberships.

Dr. Meizi He, nutrition researcher for the health unit, said Type 2 diabetes, directly related to weight gain and diet, is becoming common in children.

She said one in 20 children are diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.

Through the YMCA, families also will have access to winter sport activities, to learn skiing, hockey and skating techniques to stay active in winter months.

Marta Santos, a mother of two young children, said the program will help prevent her family from becoming one of those statistics.

"They can come and play, whatever the season. It's better for them than sitting at home."

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