

# Health MATTERS

November 2006



## Cold air's no reason to make dirty air

*Winter is looming, and with it prospects of the car's dreaded cold seats and ice-covered windows.*

Most people prefer a warm car to get into, and feel the best way to warm up their vehicle in the morning is to let it run or idle. But many people don't know that the quickest way to warm up most newer cars is to drive them. Idling for 30 seconds is all you need. In fact, excessive idling can foul or damage the engine's cylinders, spark plugs and exhaust system. As well, idling is harmful to your health and our environment.

If you choose to idle your vehicle for longer than 30 seconds you are contributing to poor air quality. A car's exhaust contains particulate matter (PM), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO) and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

These pollutants contribute to air pollution and climate change — and can harm your health in many ways, including:

- Lung infections and irritation, asthma, bronchitis, emphysema
- Some forms of heart disease
- Increased risk of cancers
- Reduced ability of the blood to carry oxygen in the body

The Ontario Medical Association has estimated that in 2005, smog was responsible for more than 2,000 visits to emergency rooms in Simcoe Muskoka. It also contributed to more than 200 premature deaths.

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### What you can do

Reducing unnecessary idling will cut pollutants, improve air quality and the health of our residents. Instead of idling:

- *Use a block heater.* You don't need to plug the block heater in all night; set it on a timer for two hours before you drive away.
- *Warm up your car by driving it.* Computer-controlled and fuel-injected engines are designed to warm up quickly as you drive.
- *Turn the car off* if you are going to be idle for more than 10 seconds. Turning your car on and off is not hard on your engine and doesn't use more gas.
- *Avoid remote control car starters.* They encourage longer idling times.

Other ways to improve our air: Keep your tires inflated and the engine properly tuned; use public transit or carpool.

### Did you know?

If a driver of a light duty vehicle avoids idling by five minutes a day, collectively over the year Canadians would save:

- 680 million litres of fuel;
- over 1.6 million tonnes of emissions and;
- \$646 million annually in fuel costs (assuming fuel costs \$0.95/L).



### More information:

Natural Resources of Canada – Idle-Free Zone  
<http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/idling/idling.cfm>

Environment Canada – Clean Air Online  
[http://www.ec.gc.ca/cleanair-airpur/Home-WS8C3F7D55-1\\_En.htm](http://www.ec.gc.ca/cleanair-airpur/Home-WS8C3F7D55-1_En.htm)

# Preventing a “trip” you don’t want to take

*As autumn advances, people are beginning to winterize their homes. If you are involved in winterizing chores, it’s a good time to check for hazards that could make people trip, slip or fall.*



A slip in the yard or a trip over a toy in the hall doesn’t seem like much more than a scraped knee and momentary annoyance. But falls often put people in hospital. For people in their later years, a fall is more than just a bit of bruising. It could be the event that steals their independence from them.

In Simcoe Muskoka, falls are responsible for 50 per cent of all hospitalizations due to injuries. And of those people in hospital from falls, nearly two-thirds are 65 or older.

Most falls happen in and around the home. The good news is that most falls are both predictable and preventable. Following are a few tips to reduce the chance of falls around the home.

- ✓ Begin by taking a walk through each room and look for changes that can be made. They are often simple—clearing clutter from stairs, removing scatter rugs, getting rid of extension or phone cords that cross where people walk. Replace any burned out light bulbs and add night lights.
- ✓ Move heavy or frequently used items into lower cupboards.
- ✓ Put slip-resistant strips in the bath and on stairs and make sure handrails are in good condition and on all stairs inside and out.
- ✓ Don’t forget to check the garage, porch and walkways around the house as well, and keep a mixture of sand and salt handy for icy walk areas.
- ✓ Look for leaks in the eaves troughs which could cause icy patches below.
- ✓ Wear well fitting rubber-soled shoes and if you use a cane, make sure to have it fitted so that it is the correct height for you.

## Keep your strength up

As people age they tend to become less active. In turn, muscles and bones weaken. Flexibility, balance and coordination also wane.

Regular physical activity and a healthy diet help keep muscles and bones flexible and strong, which in turn lowers the risk of a fall, or injury related to a fall. Physical activity also helps to maintain balance and coordination. Consider taking regular exercise classes, joining a walking club or visiting a recreation centre where different activity programs are offered.

Some medications have side effects that can increase the chance of falling. If you are on medication, you should consult with your doctor or pharmacist and keep an updated medication record with you at all times.

The Falls Prevention Checklist is a 12-page booklet that could help you make your home a safer place to live.



It’s available on the health unit website, [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org), under “Injury Prevention” in the Health Topic or Health Facts section.

You can also get a copy of the Falls Prevention Check List by calling Your Health Connection Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. at (705) 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.



# Your health is in your hands— Just remember to wash them!

*A simple thing like a handshake is a warm welcome to a friend – but it’s also an invitation to germs.*

In fact, your hands play a major role in the spread of germs that can cause illness. Think about the things you do each day that bring you in contact with germs – going to the washroom, handling raw meat, touching pets and taking out the garbage.

If you forget to wash or sanitize your hands, what will your hands have touched that could give germs a chance to spread? You may have touched food, a telephone, a door knob or money. The list is endless and as a result, so are the ways you can make yourself or others sick.

As more viruses and bacteria become resistant to drugs, proper handwashing is essential in protecting your health. Handwashing is the best way to prevent illness. It’s not new, but it works. It gets rid of dirt and germs before they can find their way into our bodies.

**Watch for announcements about free public flu clinics in your area, or contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit for more information.**

## Top 5 ways to prevent getting sick



### ***Wash your hands with soap and water.***

Wet your hands, add soap, and rub them vigorously. Scrub all surfaces including backs of hands, between fingers and under fingernails. Wash for 15 seconds. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps free and remove germs. Also remember to keep nails short and clean, wash wrists and remove watches and jewelry when you wash.

Alcohol-based gel sanitizers (minimum 60% alcohol) are a good option but only when soap and water are not available and if your hands do not look dirty. Gels do not remove the dirt. When using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry.



### ***Cover up when you cough or sneeze***

Germs that infect the nose, throat and lungs can spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes onto surfaces or people around them. Always cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. If you do not have a tissue, cover your cough or sneeze (try coughing or sneezing into the inside of your elbow). Then, wash your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.



### ***Clean and disinfect shared surfaces***

Disinfect your kitchen sink and counters daily. (Cleaning with soap removes surface dirt and grime but disinfecting is needed to kill the germs.) Disinfect your bathroom – don’t forget the door-knobs and faucet. Regularly disinfect your desk and keyboard. Avoid eating at your desk.



### ***Stay at home if you are sick***

When you are sick, there is a risk your illness can spread to those you come in contact with. Stay home from work if you are sick and keep your children home from school or daycare when they have cold or flu symptoms. The “flu” or influenza is when you have symptoms like fever, runny nose, dry cough, tiredness or muscle aches.



### ***Get your annual flu shot – it’s free!***

The flu can spread to others with just one sneeze. Each year, thousands of Ontarians fall ill with the flu. Some get severely ill, missing days of school, work or vacation. Some even die. But much of the illness caused by flu can be prevented with a flu shot. Protect yourself and those around you. If you live, work or attend school in Ontario, it’s free. Get your flu shot every year in the fall.



# Pumping iron—Your baby's mineral needs

*Advice for parents on how to feed their babies has changed over the decades.*

As science progresses, we learn more and more about what is best for babies. Currently, Health Canada and the Canadian Paediatric Society recommend exclusive breastfeeding (breast milk only) for all full-term babies from birth until they are six months of age.

Full-term infants who are exclusively breastfed for the first six months get all the iron they need from breast milk. Iron in human milk is well absorbed by infants. It is estimated that infants can use more than 50 per cent of the iron in breast milk, compared to less than 12 per cent of the iron in infant formula. After six months, babies' iron reserves start to diminish.

## New emphasis on iron-rich first foods

Health Canada now recommends that iron-rich foods be introduced at six months. This can include iron-fortified infant rice cereal or puréed meats, fish, poultry, cooked egg yolks, and alternatives such as well-cooked legumes and tofu. Health professionals recognize that the iron in meat is better absorbed than iron from non-meat sources and have found that babies can digest the meat without any difficulty. Therefore, parents and caregivers can offer iron-fortified infant cereal and/or puréed meats or alternatives as their baby's first solid food.

## Why iron is so important

Our bodies need iron to help the blood get oxygen to all the cells in the body. And babies and children need iron for their brains to develop normally. Young children are most susceptible to low iron levels because they are growing so quickly during the first two years of life.

## Other baby foods

Gradual introduction of iron-rich solid foods should complement breast milk or formula from seven to 12 months. It's usually best to introduce one new food at a time so parents can look for any adverse reactions. Wait about three to five days before introducing another new food. Start with iron-fortified infant cereal and/or puréed meats, followed by vegetables and fruits, which add colour, flavour, texture and variety to babies' diets. Milk products such as cottage cheese, other cheeses and yogurt usually follow, as well as a variety of other grain products.

Health Canada currently recommends introducing whole cow's milk between nine and 12 months of age. However, whole cow's milk is a poor source of iron, compared to breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula. This is why many health professionals recommend parents wait until baby is one year of age to help protect baby's iron levels.

Around nine months, most babies are developmentally ready to feed themselves and should be encouraged to do so. It's important that babies learn to take food from a spoon, chew, self-feed with fingers or a spoon, and drink from a cup or bottle without help. By one year of age, baby should be eating a variety of foods from the different food groups of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.



## Which foods are good sources of iron?

*Grain Products:* iron-fortified infant cereals, cream of wheat, ready-to-eat cereals, rice, bread

*Vegetables & Fruit:* baked potato with skin, raisins, avocado, prune juice, broccoli, spinach

*Meat & Alternatives:* strained infant meat (beef, chicken, pork etc.), beans, lentils, tofu, fish, egg yolk

## Where to find help with baby's first foods

If you have any concerns about how or what your baby is eating, call a public health nurse at Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.



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