

Toxic Teens

Nick Marynissen

A recent survey of Canadian female high school students set off alarm bells throughout the health community. More than seventy percent of teenage girls in Canada are either on a diet or think they should lose weight.

Media reports focused on the colossal lack of self-esteem apparent in these girls who are perpetually dissatisfied with their own bodies. However, the point that what was missed in these articles is that a portion of that demographic may actually be overweight and, due to their eating habits, have a toxic overload in their system which contributes to it.

Teenagers are enthusiastic consumers of fast foods which are not only full of saturated and trans-fats, sugar and processed flour, they're wrapped in plastic and styrofoam which is said to leech into the food and cannot be fully detoxified by the body. According to U.S. government studies the average human consumes 210 mcg of toxic phthalates from plastic wrap on foods and plastic from water and soda bottles.

Since human bodies are not built to digest these plastic residues our livers push the toxins into our fat cells for storage. Fat cells then become clogged with toxins that can damage the thyroid gland and endocrine system, disrupting metabolism and contributing to weight gain and, eventually, disease.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency published studies in 1984 and again in 1987 showing that 100% of Americans have toxins in their fat cells including styrene, dioxin, xylene and dichlorobenzene. Overweight teenagers may represent the largest portion of the population that is overloaded with toxins.

Plastics, in particular phthalates, act as hormone disrupters which have been linked to the early onset of menstruation in girls. Dr. Sherry Rogers, one of America's leading experts on environmental toxins in the body, states that this is not just a problem for girls.

"Phthalates or plasticizers have an affinity for the testicles, which accounts for the ever worsening (lowered) levels of testosterone in American males," said Dr. Rogers in a recent interview. "And it is no surprise that the average American male is producing 30% less testosterone than 20 years ago, and it is getting worse."

When teenagers congregate at fast food restaurants or eat junk food from the corner store, they are ingesting a significant amount of phthalate which could stay in their body forever. Unfortunately, even eating healthily may bring a steady diet of toxins from plastic yogurt containers, plastic wrap on vegetables, fruit, meat and cheese. From infancy, children consume phthalates leached from the plastic walls of their baby bottles.

Since the liver cannot process them, the only method of eliminating these particular toxins is by perspiring, which carries them into the air. The most effective route, for both young and old is in a sauna or steam room.

If you find it difficult to withstand the heat of a sauna, a technologically advanced type called a Far Infrared Sauna has been introduced. When inside it, you perspire at lower temperatures and can comfortably stay inside this sauna for a half hour which is difficult in a traditional high-heat sauna.

In addition, these FIR saunas utilize ceramic heaters which allow the heat to penetrate under the skin more quickly and trigger the sweat glands to start working before the core body temperature goes up. You will feel like it's a comfortable session inside a warm (rather than hot) room that causes you to sweat like a marathon runner while just reading a magazine or listening to music.

The FIR Sauna is also thought to promote weight-loss at up to 600 calories per half hour (according to the Journal of the American Medical Association) and, like other saunas, promotes a cleaner and healthier skin due to induced perspiring. It is important, however, to ensure that you replenish nutrients and water lost along with toxins while perspiring intensely.

Though FIR Saunas have been used by some complementary doctors for several years, now even beauty spas and massage therapy centres are installing them for the leisure market.

"A naturopathic doctor first introduced us to the idea," says Peter Lebesis owner of Body and Soul Day Spa in Streetsville near Toronto. Lebesis installed a portable FIR Sauna in his spa so the in-house naturopath could treat a range of medical conditions from chronic pain to heart disease.

"But now our clients are using it for skin tone, cleansing and weight-loss."

The Toronto Public Health Department recently announced that pollution in Toronto has reached such toxic levels that 1,700 people died from it last year. A further 6,000 were hospitalized.

Lebesis is now offering the sauna for "urban detox" which he believes to be an essential part of living in any city for young and old.

"It is one way that people are adapting to all this pollution," says Lebesis. "If it helps you lose weight and look great, that's fine. But really we all need to get rid of the toxins we get just from living in the modern world."

Nick Marynissen works in the alternative health industry in Ontario.
He has recently been investigating the healing effects of sauna therapy.