

## What is the endocrine system?

“The endocrine system is a complex network of glands and hormones that regulates many of the body’s functions, including growth, development and maturation, as well as the way various organs operate. The endocrine glands—including the pituitary, thyroid, adrenal, thymus, pancreas, ovaries, and testes—release carefully-measured amounts of hormones into the bloodstream that act as natural chemical messengers, traveling to different parts of the body in order to control and adjust many life functions.”

—[www.nrdc.org/health/effects/qendoc.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/health/effects/qendoc.asp)

## What are endocrine disruptors?

Simply put, endocrine disruptors are chemicals which interfere with the body’s natural hormones. Examples of identified or suspected endocrine disruptors in animals include dioxin, PCBs, DDT, 2,4-D, phthalates, mercury and lead.

## The Bisphenol-a debate

In the June 2005 issue of *Wellness@BCTF*, we wrote about the controversy over the safety of polycarbonate drinking bottles (labelled as recycling symbol #7, and in PVC containers as #3). These plastics contain the chemical bisphenol-a, a suspected endocrine disruptor (see sidebar) which mimics or disrupts the hormone estrogen. While research is still ongoing (and at this point inconclusive), bisphenol-a has been linked to a broad range of adverse health issues, including increased development of neurobehavioral disorders such as autism and hyperactivity, infertility and early puberty, Type II diabetes, and hormonally-mediated cancers such as prostate and breast cancers.

It is when the plastic is heated that the highest levels of bisphenol-a leaches into container contents. Fetuses and babies are particularly affected by exposure to this chemical, even at the low levels detected. The plastics industry has funded numerous studies supporting their claims of product safety. They strongly dispute any health concerns over goods containing bisphenol-a, however independent studies seem to be indicating there could be reason for concern. Clearly more information is needed.

While Canada is the first country to start the process of banning the importation and sale of polycarbonate containers such as bottles and sippy cups for infant use, consumers should be aware that this plastic is widely utilized in other applications. Bisphenol-a is present in the resin coating on the inside of many food and soda tins, in plastic food wraps, in some toys, CDs, and in dental materials such as sealants. Virtually every Canadian has been exposed to bisphenol-a.

At this point, the Canadian government still considers polycarbonate bottles for older children and adult use to be safe (although most major retailers no longer stock them). However, a number of retailers and manufacturers have responded to consumer concerns over the safety of these plastic products. Nalgene, for example, no longer produces polycarbonate bottles, and Eden no longer uses bisphenol-a in the canning process for most (but not all) of their tinned products.



Reducing plastic use is a bit of a challenge. My stainless steel water bottle has a plastic mouthpiece!

We are exposed to many chemicals and toxins on a daily basis, mostly at low levels. It makes sense however, for us to limit direct contact with potentially harmful substances



## Shrink your footprint and cool the planet

where possible, (for example, not using pesticides in your garden). To reduce your exposure to bisphenol-a, replace your polycarbonate bottles with stainless steel, aluminum or glass containers, don't microwave plastics, and try to use the generally healthier fresh or frozen produce rather than canned. If you want to continue using polycarbonate containers, don't store hot liquids in them, and wash them in warm sudsy water with a mild detergent rather than exposing them to the heat of a dishwasher. Discard the containers when the plastic becomes cloudy or if fine lines develop.

—Karen Steel

For further information, see CBC's "Bisphenol-a" FAQs ([www.cbc.ca/news/background/health/bisphenol-a.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/health/bisphenol-a.html)) and National Geographic's "The Bisphenol-A Debate: A Suspect Chemical in Plastic Bottles and Cans" ([www.thegreenguide.com/doc/114/bpa](http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/114/bpa)).

### EFAP

The **Employee and Family Assistance Program** offers confidential counseling services 24 hours per day for you and your extended family. Check out their informative and interesting website: [www.fgiworldmembers.com](http://www.fgiworldmembers.com)  
**Username:** bctf  
**Password:** bctf001  
or call: (English)  
1-800-268-5211 or (French)  
1-800-363-3872.

—Dale Costanzo

**We are investigating the possibility of hosting an in-house blood donor clinic. Stay tuned for further details!**

The environment is on everyone's mind these days and so here are some of my thoughts...

- How about only ordering in food from companies who supply the food in reusable containers? **NO MORE STYROFOAM!**
- Try **NOT** to use the disposable cups that are attached to our water dispensers. BCTF supplies real glasses, so let's use them.
- Get into the habit of printing everything on both sides—it's an easy option to figure out on the print window (or ask me how it's done!). And print in "econo" mode when your document is staying in house—it saves ink!
- Make a serious effort **NOT** to print off emails—especially if you are just going to read them and then recycle them.
- According to the David Suzuki Foundation, Canada is the largest consumer of energy in the world on a per-capita basis, and the second largest producer of greenhouse gases (after the United States). We have just over 30 million people, but we use as much energy as the entire continent of Africa, home to 700 million!

So switch off your monitors at the end of the day (and even at lunchtime!), turn off the lights in offices and boardrooms when not in use—and do the same at home.

- The average meal travels an incredible 2400 km (1500 miles) to get from the field to your dinner plate. All that transport creates serious environmental problems. Plus, pesticides and herbicides used to prevent moulds and fungus during shipping can be harmful to health. By purchasing food produced closer to home, you can reduce smog, greenhouse gas emissions, and air pollution and support Canadian farms at the same time.
- Try not to buy products that are going to end up in the trash (by the way, when we say we are throwing something away—where is away?) such as Swiffer products, paper towels, j-cloths. There are alternatives—our mothers never used these products!
- Here's another product to avoid—the microwave cleaner. This little plastic bag is placed in the microwave and heated for several minutes, producing steam which loosens stuck on food. Then the plastic bag is "thrown away." How about boiling a cup of water for two or three minutes in the microwave—has exactly the same result.
- A great way to avoid receiving unsolicited mail is to return it all in the prepaid envelope after having written "please take me off your mailing list"—works like a charm. I very rarely receive unsolicited mail these days.
- Consider banking with Vancouver City Savings: Vancouver City Savings Credit Union is the first North American-based financial institution to be carbon neutral. They have accomplished this by working with the David Suzuki Foundation. How would it feel if the BCTF were to become carbon neutral?

If you are serious about helping our planet, go to [www.davidsuzuki.org/NatureChallenge/at\\_Work/download.asp](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/NatureChallenge/at_Work/download.asp) and find out more about how we can make our office "greener".

—Dawn McCormick



## Congratulations to our colleagues

**George Taylor, Kate Milne**  
*(Vancouver Marathon),*  
**Murray Geiger-Adams**  
*(Boston Marathon),*  
**Parminder Bains**  
*(Vancouver Half-Marathon),*  
**Jenny Rasmussen,**  
**Jacque Boyer, George Taylor**  
*(Sunshine Coast*  
*Half-Marathon),*  
**Charlie Naylor**  
*(Vancouver Sun Run),*  
**BCTF Run for the Cure team,**  
and all our BCTF co-workers  
who challenge themselves to go  
the distance!

**Not all of us can run marathons,  
but an average 150 lb. person  
will burn this many calories in  
the following activities  
(over .5 hour):**

|                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Tai Chi         | 143 calories |
| Walking (4 mph) | 161 calories |
| Power Yoga      | 179 calories |
| Dance (hip hop) | 233 calories |
| Running (6 mph) | 358 calories |
| Hiking (uphill) | 362 calories |

## Core stability circuit

There are many strengthening and stretching exercises that you can do to help your core muscles. Strengthening these muscles may help improve your posture, strengthen your back, and help flatten your stomach.

As a registered kinesiologist (and a member of the wellness committee) I will be starting up a lunch time core stability circuit for any staff who might be interested. This will happen on Wednesdays in the Charlesworth boardroom (start time yet to be determined).

The circuit will consist of 6 stations (indoor) with a different exercise at each station. Each person will have 2-3 minutes to complete an exercise, then move on to the next station. There will be written instruction and pictures at each station outlining 3 different ways to do the assigned exercise depending on if you are at a beginner, intermediate, or advanced strength level. (Don't worry, I will be there to help figure it all out). Participants can start and finish at any station they like, and can complete as many or as few of the stations as time and energy allows.

If you are interested in participating please e-mail me at [cmackay@bctf.ca](mailto:cmackay@bctf.ca). I will contact you when I firm up the details.

—Carman MacKay BSc. Kin., RK, RRP

## Aging parents

### 10 things you should know about your aging parents

The Mayo Clinic website ([MayoClinic.com](http://MayoClinic.com)) advises that you compile the following information about your aging parents, in advance of a medical emergency:

1. Names of their doctors
2. Birth dates
3. List of allergies
4. Advance directives (such as living wills)
5. Major medical problems
6. List of medications
7. Religious beliefs (in case of blood transfusions)
8. Insurance information (B.C. Medical Plan number)
9. Prior surgery
10. Lifestyle information (alcohol use, smokers, etc.)

In a medical emergency the patient is often not the best person to supply this information. The web page provides a form that you can download to ensure these details have been noted.

—[www.mayoclinic.com/health/senior-health/HA00029](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/senior-health/HA00029)

## Bike to work week

### May 26 to June 1

The Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition is running a number of workshops designed to encourage teachers or school staff members to cycle to work. The workshops are designed to produce confident, competent cyclists able to check the safety of their bikes, plan their best routes, and ride safely in traffic.

For more information, see [www.vacc.bc.ca/schools/index.php](http://www.vacc.bc.ca/schools/index.php)

—Dawn McCormick



The following recipe is reprinted with permission of the Heart and Stroke Foundation. For further information, see their web site at [ww2.heartandstroke.ca/](http://ww2.heartandstroke.ca/)

## Minestrone soup

Serves 4

This is a great soup to make at the end of the week when you have a lot of produce to use up. Any fresh seasonal vegetables can be used in this recipe. This soup freezes well and makes for a great leftover for lunch. Serve with a crusty whole grain bun.



### Ingredients

1 tbsp (15 mL) olive oil  
1 cup (250 mL) onion, diced  
1 cup (250 mL) carrot, diced  
1 cup (250 mL) celery, diced  
2 cloves of garlic, chopped  
½ cup (125 mL) fresh parsley, chopped  
4 cups (1 L) sodium reduced chicken (or vegetable) stock  
2 cups (500 mL) water  
1 can 19oz (540 mL) navy beans, drained and rinsed  
1 cup (250 mL) potato, peeled and diced  
1 cup (250 mL) zucchini, diced  
1 cup (250 mL) Savoy cabbage, shredded  
2 cups (500 mL) fresh plum tomatoes, diced  
1 bay leaf  
1 tsp (5 mL) dried basil  
1 tsp (5 mL) dried oregano  
½ tsp (2 mL) dried thyme  
pepper to taste  
Garnish: Grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

### Directions

1. Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion, carrot and celery and sauté without browning for about 10 minutes.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients, except the cheese, and simmer on medium heat for 30 minutes.
3. Pour into bowls and top with Parmesan cheese (if using).

### Nutritional information per serving 1½ cups (375 mL):

Calories: 165 • Protein: 8 g • Fat: 3 g (Saturated fat: 0 g) • Dietary cholesterol: 0 mg • Carbohydrate: 29 g • Dietary fibre: 5 g • Sodium: 368 mg • Potassium: 702 mg • Calories 117 • Protein 4 g • Carbohydrates 17 g • Fiber 5 g • Fat 5 g • Saturated Fat 1 g • Sodium 392 mg

### BCTF Wellness Committee Members

|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| Carmen MacKay  | (TFEU) |
| Kate Milne     | (TFEU) |
| Karen Steel    | (TFEU) |
| Una Walsh      | (HR)   |
| Donna Coulombe | (BCTF) |

*The contents of this newsletter are intended to encourage better health decisions, not to provide medical advice. Please consult a qualified health professional before embarking on any new diet or exercise regime.*

