

# nutrition advice at your fingertips

by Tonia Jurbin

I needed to find the current daily requirements of calcium for myself and my 39-month-old daughter. In the back of my daytimer where I keep my phone numbers, I found an entry under "Dial-A-Dietitian". I phoned and heard a short message in English, Chinese and Punjabi, and within moments, a registered dietitian and nutritionist was on the line ready to answer my questions.

Most of the phone line staff at Dial-A-Dietitian work part-time as phone counsellors and are experienced in health care providers in their full-time occupations. They have degrees in nutrition and dietetics and a year internship in a hospital. They each have a well-rounded knowledge of diet and nutrition and expertise in diverse areas: AIDS, cracker, adult diabetes, weight control, vegetarian diet, infant nutrition, breastfeeding, osteoporosis, eating disorders, seniors and athletes' special nutritional needs, pregnancy and allergies.

Volunteers at Dial-A-Dietitian help with mailing and faxing current diet information to clients, cataloguing incoming information and general office work. New information, recent research on nutrition, and details on how diets need to be adjusted for specific ailments. The staff has access to a technical library on nutrition that has new information arriving daily.

\* When you phone, the dietitian will give you a generous amount of her time to discuss your particular problem with you including advice on meal spacing, vitamin and mineral supplements, titles of recent publications on relevant topics and where to find them. They will fax information as well, and people are welcome to call as often as needed.

Dial-A-Dietitian is a registered charity and is funded primarily by B.C. Ministry of

Health as well as the Vancouver Richmond Health Board. They are in their 25th year and for the first time, have a budget to advertise their services. They have six phone lines (three in the Lower Mainland and three 1-800 lines), a fax line and a web site that has more information about their organization and even recommends current books on health and nutrition. There are plans to greatly expand their web site in the future. The web site is [dial-a-dietitian.ml.org](http://dial-a-dietitian.ml.org).

This phone service gets requests for information from not only the general public, but also from nurses, doctors, weight counsellors, media (fact checking) and fitness trainers. Many clients of naturopaths call Dial-A-Dietitian as well. Safety information about herb usage is limited. Reliable information on herb safety concerns, possible complications, and what herbs should be combined with prescription drugs is available.

To speak to a Dial-A-Dietitian Counsellor in Greater Vancouver, call 732-9191, or toll free outside of the Vancouver area, call 1 (800) 667-3438.

