

DENIAL

IS PUTTING CANADIANS AT HIGH RISK
OF CUTTING THEIR LIVES SHORT

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2011 HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION
REPORT ON CANADIANS' HEALTH



HEART &
STROKE
FOUNDATION

Denial putting Canadians at high risk of cutting their lives short

The Heart and Stroke Foundation's 2011 Report on Canadians' Health warns that nine out of 10 Canadians are jeopardizing the quality and length of their lives. The Foundation found that many Canadians are in denial about their risk factors for heart disease such as being overweight and being physically inactive – risk factors they can manage and control.

Each year, about 250,000 potential years of life are lost in Canada due to cardiovascular diseases, including heart attacks and other chronic heart-related conditions.

"Canadians know what to do to live healthier, longer lives. But there's a huge disconnect between what we think we are doing to address our risk factors and reality," says Dr. Beth Abramson, cardiologist and spokesperson for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. "The fact is that we're not managing some of the most common and deadly cardiovascular risk factors as well as we think we are. We Canadians are living with a false sense of security that could be fatal."

According to a new Heart and Stroke Foundation poll, Canadians are aware of the importance of addressing their risk factors:

- The poll found that 84 per cent of Canadians know that nine out of 10 adults have at least one risk factor for heart disease and stroke.
- Nine out of 10 Canadians polled know that the majority of first-time heart attacks are caused by risk factors that they can control.

However, the Foundation poll also showed that Canadians have a false sense of security that is cutting their lives short. They overestimate their own healthy behaviours:

- Almost 90 per cent of Canadians rate themselves as healthy.

The reality is that nine out of 10 Canadians have at least one risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

- Only about a third said they are not physically active or don't eat a minimum of five servings of vegetables and fruit per day.

The reality is about half of Canadians don't meet the physical activity and healthy eating recommendations.

- Eighteen per cent of Canadian adults say they are obese.

The reality is that almost one quarter – 25 per cent – of Canadian adults are obese.

"We are overestimating our healthy behaviours and underestimating our tendency to be couch potatoes," says Dr. Abramson.

"It's not just years of life that are at stake," explains Dr. Abramson. "It's healthy quality years that can be gained. For example, by being physically active, you gain close to four years of life—three of those free of heart disease and stroke."

"Living longer isn't much fun if you don't have your health," she adds. Making healthier choices and controlling the modifiable risk factors are key to extending quality years of life.

On average, inactivity and obesity can each shave almost four years off a person's expected lifespan, high blood pressure two and a half years, and low vegetable and fruit consumption, 1.3 years.

The Foundation's prescription for a healthy lifestyle and more quality years of life is to manage the risk factors that can be controlled: follow a healthy diet, be physically active, know and control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels, maintain a healthy weight, be smoke-free, reduce stress, manage diabetes and limit alcohol consumption. Dr. Abramson also recommends that Canadians ask their healthcare providers to help them reach their goals.

Cardiovascular risk factors in Canadians: estimates, assessment and impact

Risk Factor	Perception (Canadians' self-reported behaviours)	Reality (Best estimate of real prevalence)	Are Canadians in denial about their health behaviours?	No assessment by healthcare provider	Impact on life expectancy
Physically inactive in leisure time	31%*	48%**	Yes	44% *	-3.6 years
Eating vegetables & fruit <5+/day	39%*	54%**	Yes	52%*	-1.3 years
Obesity (age 18+)	18%**	24%***	Yes	Weight: 40%* Waist measure: 67%*	-4.0 years
High blood pressure	17%**	19%***	Yes	18%*	-2.4 years
Smoking	23%*	20%**	No	37%*	-13.9 years

* HSF poll of 2000 Canadians conducted December, 2010; margin of error is +2.2%, 19 times out of 20

*** Results from the 2007-2009 Canadian Health Measures Study

** Self-reported data from the 2009 Canadian Community Health Survey

My Heart&Stroke Health App™ helps Canadians take control

To help people become more knowledgeable about their risk factors and support them in starting these important conversations with their healthcare providers, the Heart and Stroke Foundation today launched a free new app to complement its web-based e-tool.

"The *My Heart&Stroke Health App*™ is designed to give Canadians an overview of their health and health risks, as well as tailored action plans for healthier living," says Heart and Stroke Foundation director of research, Dr. Marco Di Buono. "We recognize that busy people may prefer the convenience of an app."

The app can be used anywhere, at any time. The results can – and should – be shared with people's healthcare providers.

"By simply pressing a button, you can learn how to add quality years to your life," says Dr. Di Buono. "This is an easy tool to help Canadians make changes to reduce their risks."

The *My Heart&Stroke Health App*™ is available for free at mobile app stores on Apple iPhone, Blackberry and Android. The app is classified under "Health & Fitness" or you can download it at heartandstroke.ca/mobileapps. If you don't have a mobile phone, you can take the risk assessment online at heartandstroke.ca/risk



Time to take action

"Reducing heart disease risks is everyone's responsibility," says Linda Piazza, director of health policy for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. This includes the public, physicians, health organizations and government.

Canadians tend to expect that their healthcare professionals will inform them about their heart disease risks, but the Foundation poll found that many healthcare professionals didn't discuss or measure some of the important risk factors with their patients.

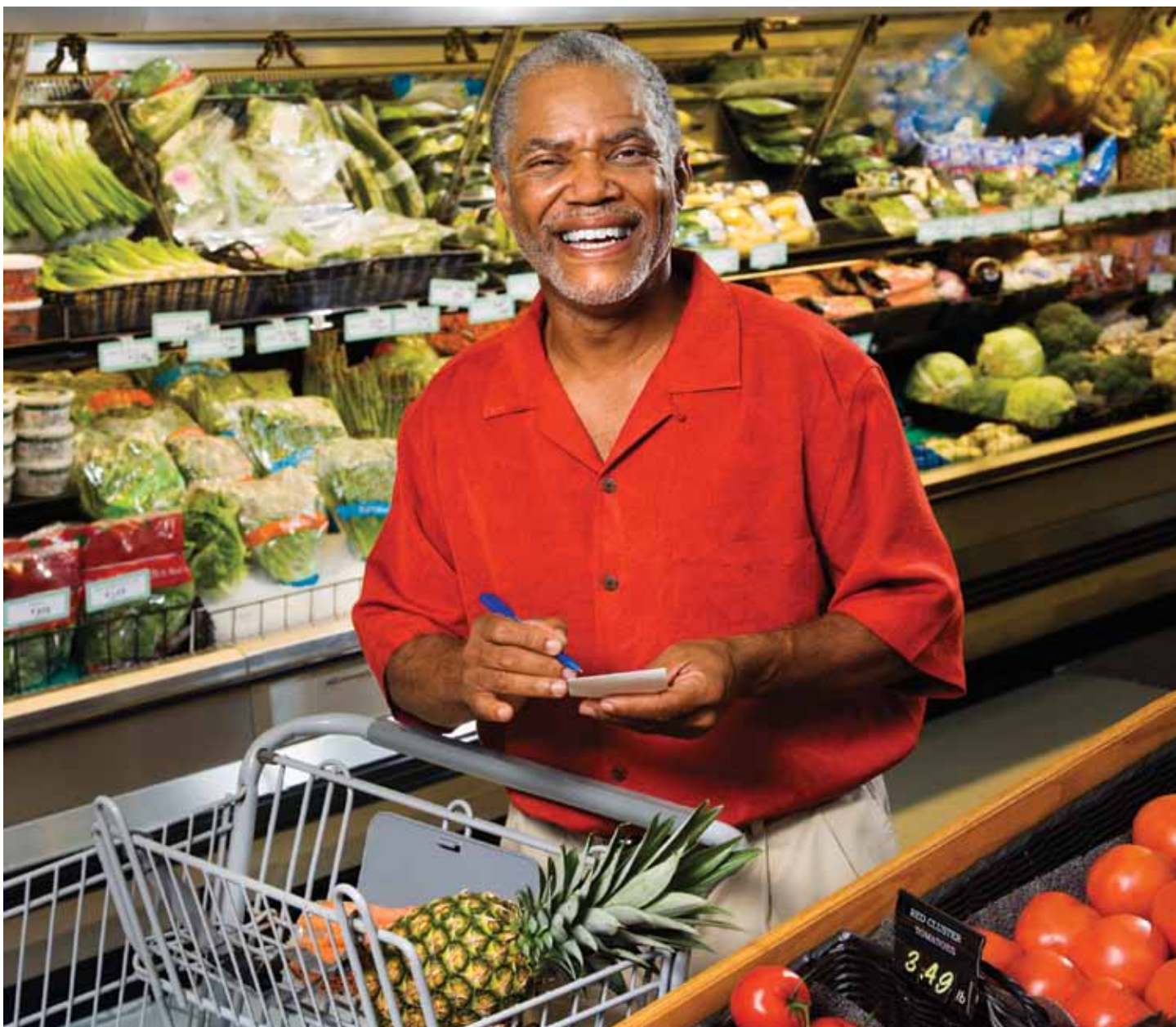
According to the poll, **eight in 10** Canadians reported that their healthcare professional had measured their blood pressure within the past year, however, only **three out of 10** patients had their waists measured.

A waist measurement is something that people can do on their own, as well as discuss with their doctor. It's a simple, low-tech, accurate way of identifying people who are at increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and metabolic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. For more information on how to measure your waist, go to heartandstroke.ca/healthywaists

The poll also found that **five out of 10** Canadians had not been asked by their healthcare provider about their diet or family history of heart disease or stroke. **Four out of 10** had not been weighed, asked about their level of physical activity, or whether they smoked – risks the Foundation has encouraged the public to discuss with their health practitioner for years.

"Healthcare professionals tend to be focused on urgent or acute healthcare issues in their busy offices," says Dr. Abramson. "Both patients and physicians have a responsibility to discuss the prevention and management of chronic disease by raising these questions."

"Knowledge is power," says Dr. Abramson. "Conversations with your healthcare provider who can explain the importance of managing risk factors can empower you to take control of your health. It's essential to start having those conversations early in life and to have them regularly as you age."



Making change – it takes a village

While people can take charge and apply what has been learned from decades of research on cardiovascular risk factors, the Heart and Stroke Foundation is also working to address the societal and environmental roots of heart disease and stroke.

“We have said for some time that we need to make sure that the healthy choice is the easy choice for all Canadians,” says Dr. Di Buono.

“Telling people to eat more vegetables and fruit is pointless unless governments, industry and organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation work together to make healthy food more affordable and accessible to all Canadians.”

He notes that individuals, families, schools, communities, businesses, industries and government collectively play a role in improving the health of Canadians.

What the Heart and Stroke Foundation is doing

Knowing that Canadians need help in improving their heart health, the Foundation has been hard at work developing free e-tools, health promotion initiatives and programs. “We know how to prevent heart disease and stroke. Our goal is to take advantage of this knowledge to help Canadians avoid a decline into illness,” says Dr. Di Buono.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation is helping Canadians by:

- **Empowering change** The Foundation provides free online e-tools for Canadians to assess their risk, develop health action plans tailored to their health needs, and receive support to meet their goals: *Heart&Stroke Risk Assessment™*, *Heart&Stroke Blood Pressure Action Plan™*, *Heart&Stroke Healthy Weight Action Plan™* and the *Heart&Stroke Health eSupport™*.
- **Promoting healthy lifestyles** The Foundation provides resources on its website heartandstroke.ca, which includes the latest information on heart disease, stroke and healthy living as well as exclusive heart-healthy recipes. Canadians can also call the toll-free Heart&Stroke InfoLine at 1-888-HSF-INFO to receive free Foundation health resources as well as sign up for programs.
- **Sharing The Heart Truth** Heart disease and stroke are the leading cause of death for Canadian women, but most don't know it. Women can find out more about their special heart-health risks and challenges by visiting TheHeartTruth.ca.
- **Supporting local communities** Foundation offices in dozens of major cities and hundreds of small towns across the country provide information, education and support to individuals and communities in their efforts toward making healthier choices. Canadians can call 1-888-HSF-INFO to find their closest office.
- **Advocating for our youth** Children's health is a Foundation priority across the country. Our provincial Foundations continue to advocate for a wide variety of initiatives including healthy eating classes, walk-to-school programs and active recreation development. Most provinces also offer *HeartSmart Kids™* toolkits for schools that include a curriculum-based program offering teacher training and materials for students.
- **Funding world-class research** More than 900 Foundation researchers and teams across the country are working on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation solutions so that Canadians can live longer, healthier lives. Since 1952, the cardiovascular death rate in Canada declined by more than 75 per cent – largely due to a number of research advances in surgical procedures, drug therapies and prevention efforts. Since 1951, the Foundation has invested more than \$1.2 billion in research.
- **Reaching out to our diverse communities** The Foundation works with Canada's multicultural populations – South Asians, Chinese, Aboriginal, among others – to bring awareness to their increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Our multicultural resources are available in such languages as Tamil, Urdu, Chinese and Farsi to help all Canadians reduce their risks and live longer, healthier lives.
- **Providing guidance on healthy foods** *Heart&Stroke Health Check™* is one way the Foundation helps Canadians eat well. The program provides educational guidance to Canadians through the logo on grocery products and restaurant menu items, as well as healthy eating information. Find out more at healthcheck.org.



The Heart and Stroke Foundation advocates to all levels of governments on behalf of Canadians by:

Building a heart-healthy Canada

After two years of work, the Foundation and partners presented the **Canadian Heart Health Action Plan** to the federal government. We need to implement the plan now to allow us to focus more on key areas such as prevention and to tackle this health challenge head-on.

Working to reduce salt intake

As a key member of the national Sodium Working Group, comprised of scientists, health experts and the food industry, the Foundation helped in the development of a report that recommended reducing the daily sodium consumption of adult Canadians to between 1,200 mg and 2,300 mg by January 2020 in order to lower the rates of high blood pressure, the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart attack.

Ridding harmful trans-fats from Canada's food supply

The Foundation continues to call on the federal government to regulate processed trans fats in Canada's food supply.

Living smoke-free

After two successful advocacy campaigns, the Foundation and partners celebrated Health Canada's new tobacco package warning labels as well as the government's adoption of legislation in 2009 to ban flavoured tobacco products and its associated marketing.



Call to action

To the Federal Government:

1. The Heart and Stroke Foundation calls upon the federal government to fund the implementation of the **Canadian Heart Health Action Plan** and:
 - Increase lifesaving defibrillator machines and CPR training in communities across the country.
 - Advance women's heart health – especially among multicultural and Aboriginal communities – by investing in a national public awareness campaign.
 - Fund a National Centre of Excellence in vascular health to improve health and foster innovation.
 - Invest in a world-leading chronic disease study across Canada to help us better understand, and ultimately reduce, heart disease and stroke.
2. Prohibit or restrict the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children and work with the food industry and public-health groups to augment the marketing of healthy foods and beverages to children.
3. Develop tax policies to encourage healthy nutrition and physical activity.
4. Renew the Recreational Infrastructure Canada (RINC) fund to ensure that recreational infrastructure, such as parks, swimming pools, community recreation centres, hockey rinks and tennis courts, can continue to be developed and improved so that Canadians can have safe ways to become physically active.
5. Continue to support public transit initiatives.
6. Implement plain and standardized tobacco packaging.
7. Implement regulations to effectively eliminate processed trans fats.

To Provincial Governments:

1. Develop and implement sustainable, regional and metropolitan development plans and increase funding for municipal infrastructure and public transportation.
2. Develop tax policies to encourage healthy nutrition and physical activity.
3. Prohibit or restrict the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children, and work with the food industry and public-health groups to augment the marketing of healthy foods and beverages.

To Municipal Governments:

1. Work with community planners and developers to improve the built environment in Canada by making zoning regulations and development decisions that:
 - Retrofit and rezone existing communities to include sidewalks, parks and pedestrian connections to schools, workplaces, shops and services.
 - Create more walkable communities that include mixed land use and density, a range of housing options and affordability and good links to frequent public transport.
 - Consult our Built Environment toolkit at heartandstroke.ca/healthycommunities
2. Implement smoking bans in outdoor spaces including playgrounds, parks, beaches, patios, sports and cultural events.

To healthcare professionals:

- Talk to your patients about the importance of knowing, understanding and managing their cardiovascular risk factors.
- Routinely assess patients' cardiovascular risks.
- Direct patients to the appropriate heart-health information at heartandstroke.ca.

To Canadians:

Don't cut your life short. Be your own health advocate:

- Get the free *My Heart&Stroke Health App*™ on your mobile phone (under Health & Fitness) or from heartandstroke.ca/mobileapps. If you don't have a mobile, take the risk assessment online at heartandstroke.ca/risk. Share your results with your healthcare provider.
- Have your healthcare provider talk to you about your weight and measure your waist (heartandstroke.ca/healthywaists).
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight by following a heart-healthy diet that is low in fat and sodium, and high in vegetables and fruit.
- Be physically active on a regular basis. Walking is a great first step.
- Know and control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- If you're a smoker, work with your healthcare provider to help you quit.
- Manage your diabetes.
- Limit alcohol use.
- Reduce stress.
- Visit heartandstroke.ca for the latest information on heart disease, stroke and healthy living; heart-healthy recipes; and online self-management tools.



The Heart and Stroke Foundation, a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.