



HEALTHY HEART

Know Your Family

Raising Heart Awareness

Although February is heart awareness month, understanding cardiovascular health should be a year round goal, as one person dies from heart disease or stroke every 7 minutes (Statistics Canada, 2011).

The Heart and Stroke Foundation's most recent awareness campaign encourages everyone to understand their family history of cardiovascular disease as it is the leading predictor of inherited risk. That means if there is heart disease or stroke in your family history, you have an increased risk of developing these two ailments.

An equally concerning fact is that many Canadians who are aware of their family history of cardiovascular disease are not proactive about their own heart health. In fact, results from a 2015 poll, conducted by Environics Research Group, found that 51% of Canadians know they have this family history but 30% of them have not consulted with a doctor about their inherited risks.

You can learn more about your inherited risk by

taking the Heart and Stroke Foundation's risk assessment.

And as always taking control of your lifestyle could help decrease your chances of developing heart disease and stroke. It is never too late to incorporate the following healthy habits:

- **Manage blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol levels.** All these can be achieved by eating a balanced diet and getting regular physical exercise.
- **Quit smoking** (or don't start if you don't smoke now). Your life span can be increased by two years if you choose not to smoke.
- **Keep active.** Strive for 10,000 steps daily as it can add more than two years to your life. Alternatively, try to aim for 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity workout per week as it can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes by 30%.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** The higher the body mass index, the greater the chance of developing diabetes, hypertension and heart disease.
- **Eat a sensible diet.** Aim for consistent daily consumptions of five or more servings of vegetables and fruits as it can reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke by about 20%. Also, be mindful of your sugar and sodium intake.

- **Practice good stress management.** The ability to reduce or cope with stress is vital for maintaining your overall health (both physical and mental).

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Source: The Public Health Agency of Canada

TRG
GROUP BENEFITS

HEALTHY LIVING

Gong Xi Fa Cai!

Celebrating Chinese New Year

“Gong Xi Fa Cai” pronounced “*gong-shee-fa-chai*” in Mandarin, which means “congratulations and be prosperous” is probably the most common greeting heard during this time of year. That’s because the Lunar New Year, or better known as Chinese New Year is celebrated on February 8 this year.

Contrary to popular belief, the celebrations actually begin on the eve of Chinese New Year as families rush home for a reunion dinner. Food portions are expectedly exaggerated in size because it’s considered bad luck to run out of food or to serve just enough for everyone. Although it is tempting to indulge in your favourite foods, your actual intake does not need to match the oversized portions on the table.

Consider the following tips to more sensible eating while still enjoying the festivities:

1. **Do not arrive at a dinner party with an empty stomach.** Make sure you eat a light snack beforehand so you avoid overeating.

2. **Opt for a smaller plate.** Since it’s considered polite to have second helpings of food, using a smaller plate can help you manage your portions.
3. **Have some soup.** Traditional Chinese dinners often include a tasty soup. By having soup at the start of dinner could help you feel a bit fuller so you’ll eat less.
4. **Drink plenty of water during the course of dinner.** Water keeps you hydrated and helps with digestion.
5. **Go for the healthier choices.** Treats, such as nuts, fruits, and vegetables, rather than the rich sugary cakes would be a wiser choice for your health and waistline.
6. **70% is good enough.** Instead of eating to fill your stomach’s maximum capacity, consider eating slowly up to 70% of fullness. By the time your brain realizes that you are full, you would have overeaten.
7. **Help clean up after dinner.** This way, you are a gracious guest and burn off calories at the same time.
8. **Plan your outings.** As there will be plenty of celebratory meals with friends and family, ration the amounts that you would eat at each household.



HEALTHY MIND

Memory Lane

How to Retain Your Memory

Aging is inevitable. Memory lapses are also inevitable but not impossible to minimize. Just as there are things you can do to improve your physical health, there are also ways to sharpen your mental health and keep forgetfulness at bay.

- **Sleep more.** The journal *Sleep Medicine* featured a study which showed the participants who napped remembered more of the tasks they had performed compared to those who didn't nap. As such, strive for seven to nine hours of sleep (including naps) per day because sleep allows your brain to regenerate and develop neurons to build new connections. This, in turn, strengthens your memory.
- **Go for a run.** Enduring all types of cardiovascular activity (running, biking, or swimming) for 20 to 30 minutes three times a week can do wonders for your brain. As our heart rate increases, so will the blood flow racing to our brain to enlarge the hippocampus and build new connections, explains Peter J. Snyder, a professor of neurology at Browns University's Alpert Medical School.
- **Eat the right food (and drink).** We're all familiar with the phrases "food for thought" and "drinks for think". These two phrases carry some good advice as proper nutrition has been linked to having a better memory. Registered dietician, Joy Bauer, advises to consume foods that contain anthocyanins, which are powerful antioxidants for the brain, as well as phytonutrients like vitamin C. Blueberries are a good source of the former nutrient, while leafy greens (spinach and kale) are loaded with the latter nutrient. If it's a challenge to eat these foods, put them in a blender and consume it as a shake.

- **Meditate.** As mentioned earlier, cardiovascular exercise is good for the brain. Meditation can also help accomplish this goal. Dharma Singh Khalsa, Medical Director and President of the Alzheimer's Research and Prevention Foundation in Tucson, recommends engaging in regular meditation to protect the brain by preventing nerve endings from being destroyed during stressful times. Meditation has also been shown to increase blood flow in the brain.
- **Do something new.** Performing a new task, or trying out a new commuting route are all positive things for our brain. By seeing something different and being in a new situation prompts our brain to retain things that happen immediately afterwards, explains R. Douglas Fields, a senior investigator in neuroscience at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland.

