

How to have a healthy heart

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(NC) – February is Heart Month and the perfect time to assess our own heart health. Here is a quick glance at the key risk factors leading to heart-related disease:

- Hypertension/High Blood Pressure: It is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease. As many as 42 per cent of us with high blood pressure don't even know we have it. With proper diagnosis and treatment, however, you can cut your risk of stroke by up to 40 per cent and heart attack by up to 25 per cent.
- High Blood Cholesterol: By lowering your cholesterol, you can dramatically reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. High cholesterol can lead to atherosclerosis, a build up of plaque in the artery walls. This makes it harder for blood to flow through your heart and body and puts you at increased risk of circulatory problems, heart disease and stroke.
- Overweight and Obesity: A majority of North American adults are either overweight or obese. By achieving and maintaining a healthy weight you can significantly reduce the risks of heart disease and stroke, and control other conditions such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes.
- Excessive Alcohol Consumption: Drinking too much of any type of alcohol can increase your blood pressure and contribute to the damage of a healthy heart. Limit yourself to one or two standard drinks a day, to a weekly maximum of nine for women and 14 for men.
- Physical Inactivity: People who are physically inactive have twice the risk for heart disease and stroke. Active living, like gardening, walking, cycling, swimming, or running is important to maintaining good heart health throughout your life.
- Smoking: This habit, including exposure to second_hand smoke, contributes to the build_up of plaque in your arteries, increases the risk of blood clots, reduces oxygen in your blood, increases your blood pressure and makes your heart work harder. Smoking also nearly doubles the risk of ischemic stroke.

Information source: HealthyOntario.com.