

**Learn more at the Heart and Stroke  
Foundation website**

This site offers a wealth of information and tools to help you and your family prevent and manage heart disease and stroke. At the site, you may find:

- Delicious heart-healthy recipes
- Tips to get and stay active for life
- Current heart disease and stroke patient information
- Breaking news on Foundation funded research
- Free newsletters, Heart&Stroke He@lthline and He@lthline for parents
- How to get involved

**Let's put our Hearts into it!**

Learn more at  
[www.heartandstroke.ca/Aboriginal](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/Aboriginal)

or call  
**1-888-HSF-INFO**  
**(1-888-473-4636)**



## **TAKING CONTROL**

Lower your risk of  
heart disease and stroke

**A Guide for  
Aboriginal Peoples**



## »» Let's put our **Hearts** into it!

### **Why are Aboriginal People at a greater risk?**

Compared to the general population, First Nations, Inuit and Métis people have higher rates of:

- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Smoking
- Childhood obesity

All of these factors increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Research has shown that heart disease rates within the Aboriginal population are as much as 50% higher and the death rate due to stroke is twice as high as that of the general population.

## **The Risk**

One in three Canadian deaths are caused by heart disease and stroke every year. Research has shown that Aboriginal People are more likely to have high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes, so First Nations, Inuit and Métis people are at an even greater risk of heart disease and stroke than the general population.

Many also believe that heart disease and stroke only affect the elderly. In reality, the risk factors for heart disease are now starting at younger ages within First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations.

As heart disease and stroke is the leading cause of death in our country, it's important to understand how you can help prevent these serious illnesses.

A great place to start is to learn to identify and control your risk factors. While you can't control your age, family history, gender or ancestry, there are many other risk factors – high blood pressure, obesity, physical activity, diabetes and smoking – that you can do something about.

## **Taking Control**

Paying attention to risk factors that you can do something about and maintaining a healthy lifestyle will help to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Talk to your healthcare provider and use this booklet to help guide you towards a heart-healthier life.

### **Let's put our Hearts into it!**

# Heart Disease

## Are you at risk?

Although heart disease describes many heart problems, coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common kind of heart disease. CAD happens when blood vessels in the heart are blocked or narrowed. This stops blood filled with oxygen from reaching the heart muscle.

Two possible results of CAD are chest pain (also known as angina) or a heart attack. Find out if you're at risk. Check all the boxes that apply to you.

## Risk factors you cannot control

- Age**  
As you get older, your risk of heart disease begins to increase.
- Male or female, combined with age**  
If you are a man aged 55 or older, your risk of heart disease is higher. If you are a woman who has gone through menopause (the change of life), your risk of heart disease is higher.
- Family history**  
Your risk of heart disease rises if close family members such as parents, sisters, brothers, or children had heart disease before age 55 or, in the case of female relatives, before menopause.
- Family background**  
If you are First Nations, Inuit or Métis, you are more likely to have high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes and as a result are at greater risk of heart disease than the rest of the population.

## Risk factors you can do something about

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure (hypertension) | <input type="checkbox"/> Being overweight          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood cholesterol             | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of physical activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smoking                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking too much alcohol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress                    |

# Stroke

## Are you at risk?

Stroke happens when the blood supply to part of your brain is cut off. Without blood filled with oxygen, brain cells begin to die. If the blood supply is not restored, the affected part of the brain dies, causing disability and/or death. Find out if you're at risk. Check all the boxes that apply to you.

## Risk factors you cannot control

- Age**  
Although strokes can occur at any age, most strokes affect people aged 65 and older.
- Male or female, combined with age**  
Until women reach menopause they have a lower risk of stroke than men. As time goes on, however, more women than men die of stroke.
- Family background**  
If you are First Nations, Inuit or Métis, you are more likely to have high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes and as a result are at greater risk of heart disease and stroke than the rest of the population.
- Family history**  
Your risk of stroke is higher if close family such as parents, sisters or brothers had a stroke before age 65.
- Already had a stroke or TIA (transient ischemic attack)**  
If you have had a stroke or a TIA, also called a mini-stroke, your risk of stroke is greater.

## Risk factors you can do something about

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure (hypertension)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood cholesterol              | <input type="checkbox"/> Being overweight          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smoking                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of physical activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart disease — atrial fibrillation | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking too much alcohol |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress                    |

**The more risk factors you have, the higher your risk of heart disease and stroke.  
Read on to learn how you can take control and reduce your risk.**



Have your blood pressure taken by a healthcare provider at least once every two years or more often if recommended by your healthcare provider.



## High Blood Pressure

Also known as hypertension, high blood pressure happens when the force of blood pushing against artery walls (the tubes that carry blood away from your heart) is too high. To know whether your blood pressure is too low or high, a healthcare provider has to measure it using a blood pressure device.

High blood pressure is the **number one** risk factor for stroke and a **major** risk factor for heart disease. That's why it's very important to keep high blood pressure under control.

### How to lower your risk:

- Have your blood pressure taken by a healthcare provider at least once every two years. If you have high blood pressure, or other related conditions, your doctor may monitor your blood pressure more often or recommend home testing.
- If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, follow the recommendations of your healthcare provider for medications and lifestyle changes.
- If you quit smoking, you can help reduce your blood pressure.
- If you are overweight, you should work with your healthcare provider on a plan to reach and maintain a healthy weight. Even a modest weight loss can improve your blood pressure.
- Get active and stay active. Physical activity helps reduce high blood pressure and improves overall heart health.
- Stress can cause your blood pressure to rise, so set aside some time each day to relax.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to 1 or 2 drinks per day. Your weekly total should be no more than 9 drinks for women and 14 for men. If your blood pressure is high, talk to your doctor about whether you should be drinking alcohol at all.
- If your doctor has prescribed a medicine to treat high blood pressure, be sure to take it exactly as directed.
- If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may also suggest that you reduce the amount of salt in your diet.



Physical activity can be a lifesaver – literally. When you're active, you can lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. Regular activity also helps prevent and control risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity.



## Lack of physical activity

People who sit or do not move around much during the day have a higher risk of heart disease and stroke than those who are active. An active, healthy lifestyle can help prevent and manage high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, excess weight, and stress—all of which increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

### How to lower your risk

- For adults - do 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days. Children and teens need to be active at least 90 minutes a day, most days of the week. Minutes count. Add up to your total 10 minutes at a time. Not sure what to do? Walk to the store. Climb stairs. Ride a bike with your children.
- Start slowly, set modest goals, and then increase your level of activity over time.
- Choose activities you enjoy such as swimming, dancing, or maybe hiking.
- Join a group or find a friend who will be active with you. This will help you to stay inspired.
- When you are doing any physical activity, you should always be able to talk. If you feel short of breath, dizzy, or have any pain in your chest, shoulders or arms, STOP what you are doing. For the warning signals of heart attack and stroke, see pages 14 and 15.
- If you have not been active, talk to your doctor before you start a physical activity program.



Nutritious, balanced meals and healthy snacks can help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. A healthy eating plan can also boost your overall feeling of wellbeing.

## Overweight

### What is it?

Being overweight, at any age, means you are at higher risk of having high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the best things you can do for your heart.

Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist circumference measurement are the two ways to find out if you carry too much weight on your body. BMI is a tool to find out whether your weight is in a healthy range proportionate to your height. Waist circumference is a measure to help determine if you are at increased risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

If you're unsure if you are at a healthy weight, talk to your healthcare provider or check your BMI and waist circumference. Find out how at the Heart and Stroke website: [www.heartandstroke.ca/healthywaists](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthywaists).

### How to lower your risk

- **Eat a healthy diet**
  - Reach and maintain a healthy weight by eating healthy foods that support good heart health. Be physically active, too.
  - Ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian to learn about healthy eating. You should follow Canada's Food Guide and the "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide — First Nations, Inuit and Métis" booklet. [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)
- **Lose weight slowly**  
Make your goal of reaching a healthy weight a long-term promise to yourself.
- **Avoid new or "fad" diets**
- **Eat healthy foods that are lower in fat**, especially saturated and trans fats. Include vegetables and fruit, whole grains (complex carbohydrates), and high-fibre foods in your daily diet. Try making wholegrain bannock or serving more wild berries.
- **Use less fat in cooking**
  - Bake, broil, steam, boil, microwave, or barbecue your food.
- **Drink plenty of water**
- **Manage the size of food portions**  
Divide your plate into four sections. Fill half with vegetables, one quarter with whole grains and one quarter with meat or meat alternatives.
- **Calm your stress**  
If you eat too much as a way of coping with stress, find the source of your stress and learn new ways to cope.

## Smoking

Smoking and being exposed to second-hand smoke increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. The bad health effects of smoking and second-hand smoke include:

- The build-up of plaque in your arteries
- Higher risk of blood clots
- Lower oxygen levels in your blood
- Strain on your heart

### How to lower your risk

#### Ask for help

Making a change to being smoke-free can be hard. Don't be afraid to ask for help and support from your family, friends, and your healthcare provider. Many people have quit smoking with the help of nicotine replacements and prescription products. Please speak to your healthcare provider about becoming smoke free. They can help you decide on the best method for you.

To learn more about quitting and telephone help lines, visit [www.heartandstroke.ca/healthyliving](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthyliving). You can also visit Health Canada's website at [www.gosmokefree.ca](http://www.gosmokefree.ca) or call 1-800-O-Canada.



“After you quit smoking, your risk of heart attack begins to decrease within just two days. Within a year it's cut in half. And within 10 to 15 years, your risk of heart disease is almost the same as a non-smoker's.”



## Diabetes

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples are at higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes, the most common form of this serious medical condition that may lead to heart disease and stroke.

The new Canadian Guidelines for Diabetes have identified that Aboriginal Peoples are at high risk for type 2 diabetes, especially if they:

- are overweight or obese for their height, age and sex (also known as Body Mass Index or BMI)
- have too large a waist measurement – more than 40 inches (102 cm) for men and more than 35 inches (88 cm) for women (also known as waist circumference)
- are not physically active enough
- eat unhealthy foods

It is important for Aboriginal Peoples to be tested for type 2 diabetes. If you are:

- An adult with one or more risk factors, then testing should happen every 1 to 2 years.
- A child over the age of 10 with one or more risk factors, then testing should happen every 2 years.

Other factors that put you at risk for type 2 diabetes include: being older than 40, a family history of diabetes, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol.

Talk to your healthcare provider about diabetes. People with these risk factors **can** do something about becoming healthier.

### If you have been diagnosed with diabetes

Work closely with your healthcare team to set goals for your blood glucose levels. Make sure you know what your target levels are.

## Warning Signals of a Heart Attack

### **PAIN**

- Sudden discomfort or pain that does NOT go away with rest
- Pain may be in the chest, neck, jaw, shoulder, arms or back
- Pain may feel like burning, squeezing, heaviness, tightness or pressure
- In women, the pain may be more vague

### **SHORTNESS OF BREATH**

- Feeling that you cannot breathe well

### **NAUSEA**

- Indigestion
- Vomiting

### **SWEATING**

- Cool, clammy skin

### **FEAR**

- Anxiety
- Denial

If you experience any of the warning signals of a heart attack you should immediately CALL 9-1-1 or your local emergency number for help, or have someone call for you.

## Warning Signs of a Stroke or Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA or mini-stroke)

### **WEAKNESS**

- Sudden loss of strength or sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg, even if temporary

### **TROUBLE SPEAKING**

- Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding or sudden confusion, even if temporary.

### **VISION PROBLEMS**

- Sudden trouble with vision, even if temporary

### **HEADACHE**

- Sudden, severe and unusual headache

### **DIZZINESS**

- Sudden loss of balance, especially with any of the above

If you experience any of these warning signs tell someone immediately and call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.



Research has shown that heart disease rates within the Aboriginal population are 50% higher than that of the general population.



Recognizing and responding immediately to the warning signs of stroke can improve survival and recovery.