



Health Canada's role is to foster good health by promoting health and protecting Canadians from harmful products, practices and disease. Health Canada is developing new initiatives to encourage women and health providers to work together to promote healthy living and awareness of the risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease.

WOMEN AND HEART HEALTH

Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)

CVD — namely heart disease and stroke — is largely preventable through a healthy lifestyle that includes no smoking, healthy food choices, physical activity and maintenance of a healthy weight. Preventive care as appropriate to control blood pressure and blood cholesterol and other lipids is also essential. Studies show that Canadians have low awareness of the causes of CVD. A full 30% cannot name even one of the major risk factors for heart disease (smoking, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol, sedentary lifestyle, diabetes).

Current Situation

- Cardiovascular disease is the major cause of death and disability among Canadian women. The number of deaths from CVD are just about equal for Canadian men and women. In 1996, 40,037 men and 39,924 women died of CVD.
- Two in three women have one or more of the major risk factors for heart disease.
- In 1996, CVD in women accounted for over 2,569,333 hospital days, a greater number than that reported for other conditions, including cancer, pregnancy and neurological ailments.
- In 1996, 26% of women aged 15 and over smoked. Forty-eight percent of women smokers aged 18 to 24, and 23% aged 25 to 34 also take oral contraceptives, thus significantly increasing their risk for CVD.
- Thirteen percent of Canadian women have high blood pressure, and 45% have elevated blood cholesterol.

- Women are under-represented in heart health research and prevention studies. The lack of data and the consequent difficulty of determining appropriate preventive interventions for women hamper their ability to deal with heart disease.

Health Canada Initiatives

The Canadian Heart Health Initiative (1988-2003) is a federal-provincial strategy encompassing disease prevention, health promotion and healthy public policy; it is based on alliances with community, provincial and national partners. The Heart and Stroke Foundation is a major partner in the Initiative. Health Canada contributes \$2 million per year. Approximately \$300,000 per year from this Initiative is allocated to projects which specifically target women's heart health issues, including integrated action on nutrition, physical activity, tobacco reduction and psychosocial factors.

Prevention

- Participation in collaborative heart health promotion projects that address women and CVD prevention issues, such as the Tobacco Control Strategy and the Vitality Program (nutrition, healthy weight, active living).
- Facilitate development and dissemination of evidence-based clinical and public health preventive guidelines for CVD risk factors and related conditions.

One in a series of fact sheets prepared for the



Policy

- A National Consultation on Women, Heart Disease and Stroke, took place in Ottawa in April 1998.
- Co-sponsor of the International Heart Health Conferences, Victoria, B.C. (1992), Barcelona (1995), Singapore (1998).

Heart Health Facts

- Eight times as many women die from heart disease and stroke than from breast cancer. 40% of all Canadian women's deaths are due to heart disease and stroke.
- A woman's risk of death from heart disease **increases 4 times** after menopause. The rate of stroke also increases dramatically after menopause.
- Some women may have **different symptoms** than men such as indigestion-like discomfort, vague chest pain, discomfort or pressure, nausea or back pain. These symptoms occur more often in women than men, and should not be ignored. It is important to know that 70% of women have similar symptoms of a heart attack as men, such as sudden strong crushing chest pain and shortness of breath.
- Women with diabetes at any age are at more risk of developing heart disease and stroke than men who have diabetes. Compared to women without diabetes these women have **triple** the risk of heart attack and a much greater risk of a stroke.
- Compared to active women, inactive women are twice as likely to die from heart disease and stroke.
- Contrary to popular belief, hypertension (high blood pressure) is not usually caused by stress or anxiety. It is a condition that makes your heart work too hard. **Have your blood pressure checked regularly.**

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

Sources:

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Aussi disponible en français.

Our mission is
to help the people of Canada
maintain and improve their health

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Health Canada