

Celebrate Canada Health Day
May 12, 2006

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About the Canadian Health Network (CHN)

The CHN (www.canadian-health-network.ca) offers one-stop access to the best and most trusted health information resources on the Internet.

Provided through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), CHN provides timely, reliable, top-quality information on health and health-related issues. It is non-commercial, bilingual and national in scope and brings

together the knowledge of key health information providers including the PHAC, Health Canada, non-profit organizations at all levels, universities, hospitals, libraries and community organizations.

This special Globe and Mail information supplement reflects the CHN's mission, which is to promote healthy choices by communicating trustworthy information on health promotion and disease and injury prevention provided by a network of expert organizations.



Health matters

Physical activity: moving towards improved health care in Canada

BY HON. TONY CLEMENT, MINISTER OF HEALTH



As Minister of Health, I recognize that health care remains Canadians' number one priority.

Our government has set a new course for the future of health care in Canada – a future that is focused on making sure all Canadians receive essential medical treatment within clinically acceptable waiting times. This is our guarantee.

Physical activity is key to maintaining Canadians' health and well-being, and plays a role in the prevention of many chronic diseases, including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. The promotion and support of physical activity can help ensure the sustainability of our health-care system and will also help us to achieve tangible progress in meeting commitments under the Patient Wait Times Guarantee. Our government's recent 2006 Budget provides a children's fitness tax credit for up to \$500 – effective January 1, 2007 – in eligible fees for physical fitness programs for each child under the age of 16.

Studies show that regular physical activity plays a key role in improving health and in preventing disease, disability and premature death. And

there's more good news. Even moderate forms of physical activity, like a brisk 30-minute walk, can result in measurable health gains.

Conversely, experts here in Canada and around the world agree that the prevalence and impact of physical inactivity is emerging as one of the largest public health threats in the western world today. A majority of adult Canadians are not active enough to benefit their health. Childhood obesity levels have more than doubled in a 15-year period ending in the late 1990s. And among the four chronic diseases that result in 2/3 of deaths in Canada – diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease – all share common preventable risk factors: physical inactivity, unhealthy eating and tobacco use. This situation is even more serious among Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

So how can we get more Canadians to "walk the talk" and enjoy the resulting health benefits and decreased demand on our health-care system? Removing barriers to regular physical activity is a good place to start.

This means making the places where Canadians live, learn, work and play more supportive of physical activity. It is about making active choices easy choices. Providing affordable, safe and accessible community programs, especially for children and Aboriginal Canadians, is just one example. And supporting this with visible public campaigns that give Canadians the information they need to make informed choices about regular physical activity, such as how to get started, stay motivated and reduce the risk of injury. Fortunately, many governments and non-governmental organizations are working together to help inactive Canadians take the first step towards improved health. These partnerships must continue.

Just as we are addressing the challenges facing Canada's health-care system, we are working to encourage Canadians to be physically active. Increasing physical activity in Canada is complex. But we can commit to take it one step – or swim, or cycle, or run – at a time.

I look forward to working with all Canadians to improve our nation's health and quality of life through regular physical activity. □

Happy Canada Health Day!

Tony Clement
Minister of Health

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Chronic Disease Prevention

Battle requires integrated, strategic approach

BY RANDALL ANTHONY MANG

The impacts and incidence of chronic disease in Canada are not only alarming, they're on the rise. While this trend is dire, experts say hope resides in the fact that many of these diseases have common determinants. If effectively addressed through public awareness, action and supportive policies, devastating illnesses including cardiovascular disease (CVD), stroke, Type II diabetes and many forms of cancer may be prevented.

Each year, approximately 200,000 Canadians suffer from cardio-related health issues and 79,000 Canadians die from heart disease and stroke. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research notes that 80 per cent of heart attack risk alone can be avoided simply by eating well, exercising and stopping smoking.

Healthier diets may also help people avoid colorectal cancer, a disease diagnosed in nearly 20,000 Canadians last year and which killed an additional 8,400. At-risk members of the population can further reduce their risk through screening of pre-cancerous polyps, which may be removed before they become deadly.

Ironically, while obesity is linked to Type II diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease, Canadians are continuing to get fatter. One in three children born since 2000 is at risk of developing Type II Diabetes in his or her lifetime, a result of poor diet and lack of exercise.

Jay Onysko, an expert with the Public Health Agency of Canada's Centre for Chronic

Disease Prevention and Control, says the first line of defence is to exhaust primary prevention steps. "These are universal for cancer, diabetes and CVD: maintain healthy body weight, exercise, have a good diet, avoid excessive alcohol and don't smoke."

He notes, however, that these steps will not work for everyone. For example, individuals who are overweight, suffer from hypertension or diabetes and are therefore prone to CVD (which can lead to congestive heart failure and stroke) should urgently discuss factors such as blood pressure and cholesterol levels with their doctor.

Ottawa family physician Jay Mercer sees patients suffering from chronic diseases every day. He says a number of things can be done to mitigate and delay disease progression. His treatment begins with healthy doses of information.

"The key, for me, is to be able to provide information, as well as access to medication and other treatment, as part of the clinical encounter," he says, noting that the Canadian Health Network website is an ideal educational resource.

Other first steps in Dr. Mercer's treatment plan include smoking cessation, gradual weight loss and exercise. "If and when we move to medication, more education will go with it."

He says patients need to understand that the more aggressively they can manage their disease the better off they will be long-term. "Maybe they won't have that heart attack or stroke," he says.

Jay Onysko notes that screening is another vital line of defence. While population-based screening for breast and cervical cancers have proved highly effective for target groups, he sees a need for even greater public awareness and acceptance of screening, particularly for colorectal and prostate cancers. "People need to understand the pros and cons, the chances of false positives and negatives, so they can make informed decisions about screening."

Canadian Medical Association president Ruth Collins-Nakai says Canada requires a comprehensive strategy, supported by policies relating to regulation, information, program-spending and tax levers, to deal with the social and environmental determinants common to all these diseases.

"Information alone didn't change smoking behaviour," says Dr. Collins-Nakai, noting that taxes have helped by making tobacco pricey, while bylaws have made smoking in public places taboo.

"There are relatively effective policies that can be put in place at all levels of government to reduce exposure to the barrage of chronic diseases," she says. "We have to make healthy choices easier and cheaper."

She adds, "If we want a sustainable health-care system, we all have to look at prevention – not just governments – everyone has a role to play to contribute to society's health." □

Health info for every body

COME AND DISCOVER HEALTH INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST

www.canadian-health-network.ca

Health promotion takes front seat

Social factors targeted

BY TAMMY LABER

Health is not just an individual matter. Higher income and social status are linked to better health. One Canadian study found men in the top 20 per cent income bracket live on average six years longer than those in the bottom 20 per cent. For women, the difference was three years.

According to Dr. John Frank, scientific director of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Population and Public Health, this is because people with lower income and social status have less control and fewer choices in their lives. "Children in low-income families are over two-and-a-half times more likely to have basic health problems that interfere with daily functioning than children from high-income families," Dr. Frank

says. "There are hardly any health problems that are not more common, the poorer you are."

As a result, it is too simplistic to just tell people how to improve their health. "People need to be encouraged, but you have to change the environment. Other countries like Norway, Sweden and even Poland have managed to dramatically cut child poverty. We need to change our tax and transfer policies to do the same. Because the poorer you are as a child, the younger you (are likely to) die," Dr. Frank explains.

Elizabeth Gyorf-Dyke, the director of the Canadian Population Health Initiative, agrees. "We've been telling people to exercise and eat right for 30 years, yet obesity rates are increasing," she says. "We have to find ways to make the healthy choice the easy choice. We need to talk about the environment people live in, not only the individual. Also, a sense of belonging to a community is linked to better health."

Dr. Frank and Ms. Gyorf-Dyke say that schools and workplaces can also play roles by promoting good nutrition and regular exercise. However, both experts stress the need for evaluation of programs to see which ones really work. □

Health tips: overall well-being

Make positive choices

Making lasting change is difficult. But if you stick with them, these positive choices are likely to improve your physical, mental and emotional health:

- Don't smoke.
- Eat nutritiously. Choose a variety of foods including plenty of fruits and vegetables.

- Pack a healthy lunch instead of grabbing fast food.
- Avoid having more than two alcoholic drinks a day.
- Exercise several times a week. You'll keep your body strong, reduce stress and improve your energy.
- Get enough sleep.
- Brush and floss your teeth daily.

- Practice safer sex.
- Build a network of social contacts.
- Connect with your community.
- Learn healthy ways to cope with stress such as meditation.

Take control

Research shows the degree of control you have over your life influences your health. This is especially true when it comes to dealing with stress and the choices you have. If possible, try to find ways to increase your control over your life.



Eat well, live more actively

Fill up on nutritious foods, and burn those calories

BY LORI BAMBER

When it comes to healthy eating, we've stopped trusting our intuition, and in some cases, no longer enjoy the food we eat. "We are a nation obsessed with dieting, gimmicks and the 'latest and greatest' cure-all health books," says dietitian Andrea Holwegner. "At the same time, we are experiencing growing health problems and obesity. Striving for perfection, setting rigid goals and depriving ourselves of enjoyable foods set us up to fail."

A better approach revolves around smaller steps and a transition to healthy diet that can be sustained over time. In fact, says Ms. Holwegner, president of Calgary's Health Stand Nutrition,

"guilt-free eating" – learning to balance all foods – is the best strategy.

Rosie Schwartz, Toronto dietitian and author of *The Enlightened Eater*, agrees that healthy eating begins with a positive focus: fuelling our bodies with delicious, healthy food. "Variety is the key. Try to include a couple of new things in your shopping basket."

Healthy eating and an active life should reduce stress, not add to it. "We go to the gym, but look for the closest parking spot at the mall because we're in a hurry," says Ms. Schwartz. "We need to look at ways to increase our activity levels overall. Food is fuel, and when we increase

our activity, we can take in more nutrients."

One thing is sure: Canadians need a new approach to personal health. Chronic diseases, such as Type II diabetes (the kind related to obesity and inactivity), are epidemic. Without change, our children may in fact be the first generation with shorter life expectancies than their parents. Healthy eating and even moderate physical activity can help prevent chronic diseases and their complications.

"It's about quality of life," says Ms. Schwartz. Embracing a healthy lifestyle that includes active living and healthy foods will help ensure a better future. □

Health tips: daily activities

Green means go

Need a prescription for good health? Visit www.goforgreen.ca for a checklist of activities including: walk or cycle to work; school or on errands; skate; play outdoors; cut grass (with a push mower); hike with a parent/friend; and use the stairs.

"The Walking/Cycling School Bus helps to improve children's health by including physical activity in their everyday activities, while showing them how they can make a difference in helping the health of the environment," says Go for Green executive director Johanne Lacombe.

"Organizing a walking/cycling school bus is inexpensive and easy, and the benefits are countless."

Exercise into the twilight years

About 60 per cent or more of older Canadians are insufficiently active, but even mild activity has proven to have physical and mental benefits for seniors of all ages.

A Home Support Exercise Program (HSEP) developed by the Alberta Centre for Active Living and the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging provides a great way for seniors to get active. It is helping seniors in Alberta First Nations communities lead longer, healthier lives by supporting activity at home.

Sexual health

Educating youth encourages informed choices

BY JANE MUNDY

Health tips: safe sex

Understanding safe sex and maintaining a healthy attitude about sex are important contributors to overall wellness.

For parents

Kim Martyn, sexual health educator, Toronto Public Health offers the following advice to parents of kids of all ages:

Pre-school

- Use real names for body parts. A well-informed child helps the parent maintain a more open relationship about sexual matters. It's also a deterrent if anyone might take advantage of a child's ignorance.

Pre-Puberty

- An eight-year-old should have a basic understanding of sexual intercourse. Knowledge boosts confidence and reduces the influence of peer pressure.

Puberty: (STIs)

- When discussing pregnancy or Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) with adolescents, focus on sharing your values and hopes with your

children. Maintain a balance between understanding and expectation. For facts about these diseases, point children to appropriate resources at school, in magazines and online.

Teens

- Teens typically know basic facts about HIV and AIDS, condom use and pregnancy prevention, but not about STIs. Incidence of chlamydia, for example, is rising. While girls typically use birth control, they are less likely to use condoms, which reduce STI risk. Make sure teens know where to obtain youth-friendly services and resources about STIs.

Tattooing and body piercing

Brandy Svendsen, support and outreach co-ordinator at YouthCo, cautions youth on the hazards of tattooing and body piercing. YouthCo works with Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS positive youth and educates young Canadians on various health precautions.

- Tattooing and body piercing can present health hazards, including risks to diseases such as Hepatitis C. To reduce risk, make sure the facility has a health inspection certificate and that individual ink containers are thrown out afterwards – no double dipping. Tattoo instruments and shared piercing jewelry must be sterilized.

Q&A with Dr. David Butler-Jones

Dr. David Butler-Jones, the head of the Public Health Agency of Canada, has a challenging job: to promote and protect the health of Canadians. Recently, the Canadian Health Network talked to Dr. Butler-Jones about current issues in public health and his role as our first Chief Public Health Officer.



What are the broad determinants of health, and how do they affect the overall well-being of Canadians?

Our understanding of what makes and keeps people healthy continues to evolve. We know that everything is interrelated – good diet, active living, safe practices, the environment, job stress, income, genetic makeup and social status.

That's what public health is, dealing with these determinants of health – not in an isolated way, but in a comprehensive way that understands how they connect and what changes need to be made to improve the overall health of the population. No single program, agency or sector can do it alone. But if we work collaboratively, we can make a big difference.

What, in your opinion, is the biggest health-care challenge facing Canadians today, and how can we address it?

For me, as a physician and as the Chief Public Health Officer, the biggest

challenge is that of chronic diseases. While society needs to track and work to prevent and treat infectious disease, chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and others, account for two-thirds of all deaths in Canada.

The hopeful thing is that the majority of these premature deaths are preventable. We marvel at our truly remarkable ability to prolong life by medicines or procedures like heart operations, but wouldn't it be far better if we also did the preventative things that might mean the patient didn't need a heart operation in the first place?

It's a bit like taking care of your car. Keep it long enough and you'll need to take it in for repairs, but if you're doing regular tune-ups and oil changes and driving responsibly, you won't need to take it in to the shop nearly as often, and you won't have to spend nearly as much on repairs.

Public health helps keep people out of the repair shop.

What, in your opinion, are the most important things people can do to protect their health and prevent disease?

- i. *Quit smoking. It's the number one cause of preventable death. I can't stress it enough. If you're not a smoker, don't start. If you're a smoker, stop.*
- ii. *Wash your hands. Our mothers were right on this one. We come in contact with all kinds of potential infections every day, and frequent hand washing is our best protection for ourselves and others.*
- iii. *Exercise. You don't have to overdo it. Consider just 10 to 15 minutes of extra activity each day. Stretching, a short jaunt with the dog, parking a few blocks from work and walking in, or better yet, cycling to work, all help.*
- iv. *Eat healthier and in moderation. Obesity is one of Canada's increasingly serious public health issues, and small changes can mean a lot.*

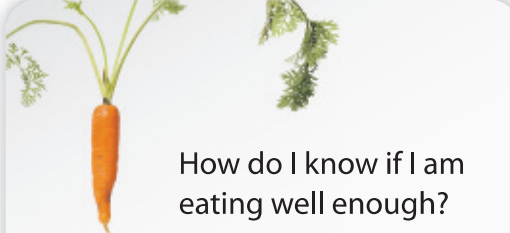
These choices are strongly influenced by the environments where people live, work, learn and play. So I think communities – whether we're talking about schools, neighbourhoods or governments – have an obligation to help individuals by making the healthy choices the easy choices.

What advice do you have for parents?


The best piece of advice I think I can give parents is love and respect your children. Kids who know someone cares about them and who is willing to listen to them usually do well. Behave in a way that you'd hope your kids will act. Also give kids an opportunity to be active, both mentally and physically, and eat well. It sounds pretty basic, but many other things flow from this. □

What role do you think programs such as the Canadian Health Network play in helping educate Canadians about making lifestyle choices to protect individual and community health?

An important part of any choice or desire for change is the need to have factual information. It needs to be relevant, available and easy to find. In this way, the Canadian Health Network is a key resource for health. It covers a comprehensive range of issues in order to provide accurate information that is easy to access and navigate on the Internet.




How do I know if I am eating well enough?



How long are men living these days?



Are household cleaning products harmful to my health?




How can I reduce my stress level?



How does alcohol affect health?



How does employment affect mental health?



Do distractions while driving cause more collisions?



Can children with disabilities go to their neighbourhood schools?



What is complementary and alternative health care?

For the answers to these questions and many more, visit:

www.canadian-health-network.ca

HEALTH INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST

Mental health a cornerstone of wellness

Practice mental fitness

BY LORI BAMBER

If all the other good reasons to get outside for a walk haven't moved you yet, try this one on: it will make you feel good and improve your mental health. Even moderate activity stimulates endorphin release, and endorphins improve our mood, resilience and physical health – and help us manage negative stress, which left unchecked can trigger mental illnesses such as depression.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), physical activities, including meditation, massage and deep breathing, help

alleviate anxiety and lessen the withdrawal and feelings of hopelessness that characterize depression.

A focus on mental health, including identifying and practicing ways to improve our 'mental fitness,' can help prepare us for those times when our well-being may be challenged.

"It's about looking at ways we can change our behaviour," says CMHA CEO Penelope Marrett. "Everyone needs mental health. We need to find ways to support better mental health in all individuals, including those who suffer from chronic disease."

Ms. Marrett says physical activity is a vital part of a mental fitness plan, as is 'positive psychology,' strengthening the characteristics that define wellness, such as the ability to enjoy life, resilience, balance, flexibility and self-actualization.

Awareness of our environment is also important. Bill Wilkerson, CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, says that wellness requires becoming familiar with the risks to mental health and chronic illness that stem from where and how we work, and how we confront life's daily pressures. □

Health tips: mental health

Manage everyday stress and stay healthy

The Canadian Mental Health Association (www.cmha.ca) offers these important tips for managing daily stress:

- Use relaxation techniques – yoga, meditation, deep breathing or massage.
- Exercise – physical activity is one of the most effective stress remedies.
- Watch what you eat – alcohol, caffeine, sugar, fats and tobacco all put a strain on your body's ability to cope with stress. A diet with a balance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and foods high in protein but low in fat will help create optimum health.
- Get enough rest.
- Have some fun – laugh and be with people you enjoy.

Enjoy life, feel better

Being mentally healthy leads to better overall enjoyment of life, so Canadians can improve mental fitness through the practices of activities like these:

- Daydream while breathing slowly and deeply; imagine a beach, hushed forest or favourite room.
- Collect positive moments, recalling times of pleasure, comfort, tenderness or confidence.
- Try distracting or comforting yourself when you experience negative thoughts and can't solve the problem right away.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Enjoy regular physical activities and hobbies.
- Set attainable personal goals to build

confidence and enjoy a sense of satisfaction.

- Express yourself and share humour.

Foster support in workplaces

According to Bill Wilkerson, CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, there are strong reasons why strategic mental illness prevention and support should be part of every effective business plan.

Among the compelling statistics provided by the Roundtable's website are the following:

- The costs of mental illness in the Canadian labour force exceed \$33 billion per year.
- Depression is the leading cause of disability in the workforce.
- The greatest concentration of mental illness occurs among men and women in their prime working years with 10 or more years of service with their current employer.



Balancing act

Keep work and family in check

BY TAMMY LABER

A work-life strategy is not just a "nice-to-have," it's necessary for achieving long-term success. "People who feel they have balance between work and other aspects of their lives report a greater sense of control and more satisfaction," says Nora Spinks, who runs Toronto-based consultancy Work-Life Harmony Enterprises.

Some people are happy in the fast lane, at least for a while. But working long hours can be bad for your health.

People who work long hours are more likely to smoke, drink excessively and eat poorly. "They skip meals and then gorge themselves later. Also, they often don't get enough exercise," Ms. Spinks explains. Over time, this can

harm physical and emotional health. "They may use painkillers and antacids to mask the symptoms, but the real problems are depression and guilt. They also have more absenteeism because they burn out."

The three stages of burnout are exhaustion, denial and despair. "Companies are seeing a phenomenon called 'presenteeism.' People are physically there, but are no longer really engaged. They've given up," Ms. Spinks says.

Employees with high work-life conflict are more likely to be absent from work and more likely to take so called "mental health days." The estimated direct cost of absence due to work-life conflict in Canada is \$2.7 billion

a year.

Many people are better off in the slow lane, working shorter hours or even taking a break or sabbatical from time to time. For some, creating their own path (self-employment) is the right choice.

Ms. Spinks points to key factors affecting an individual's sense of harmony, including the person's profession, whether they have advancement options and a supportive environment, the work flexibility and the resources available.

She suggests people establish personal and professional policies and draw clear boundaries. "It helps to define what is good enough as well as excellence." □

Health tips: stress relief

Workplace stress can harm your health

Workplace stress presents risks to mental and physical health and to safety. The consequences can include everything from the common cold to heart disease, cancer and injuries. Stress also leads to workplace conflicts. Those most at risk face one or more of these:

- High Demand/Low Control,
- High Effort/Low Reward,
- High Challenge/Low Opportunity

For those under stress, a support system that includes good family support, adequate sleep, regular exercise and a healthy diet is crucial.

Five strategies to reduce stress

1. Get as much control as possible over the controllable, so you can

effectively manage the uncontrollable.

2. Prepare for the predictable. For example, you know kids will get sick sometimes. What's your back-up plan?
3. Know your rights and responsibilities.
4. Negotiate effectively for flexibility and support.
5. Know what you really need, and plan to get it. Don't let anyone tell you what's perfect for you.

Cell phones and driving a bad mix

It's risky to use cell phones or other devices while driving, says Deanna Singhal of Canada's Traffic Injury Research Foundation, a PhD candidate researching this area. According to cognitive resources theory, every task requires some brain capacity. Using a cell phone while driving means the conversation uses up the spare capacity...and performance suffers. Which task suffers more depends on where the driver focuses attention. But drivers may miss cues and therefore opportunities to prevent a collision.

Body image and self-esteem

Issues loom large, especially for women and children

BY LORI BAMBER

Self-esteem, body image and health are inextricably linked. Healthy self-esteem and a positive body image motivate physical activity and good eating choices; mental and physical health support our self-esteem; and self-esteem allows us to pursue rewarding careers or education, further enhancing our overall wellness.

For parents of young children, it may be difficult to know how to introduce kids to this virtuous circle, but that role is a critical one. A recent study commissioned by the health and beauty products maker

Dove, through the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, found that parents and friends are more important to self-image and self-esteem than media or celebrities.

The report, *Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs*, developed in consultation with Dr. Nancy Etcoff of Harvard University and Dr. Susie Orbach of the London School of Economics, discovered that fully 37 per cent of Canadian women say their mother was the earliest influence on feelings about self-beauty and body image.

Of the study, Dr. Etcoff says, "Mothers have the capability to help girls to face the difficult and demanding world of their peers and of their culture with strength and confidence rather than shame and doubt."

That influence may have an impact on every aspect of a child's life. "One of the most disturbing trends the study has exposed is the extent to which negative body and beauty image subtly prevents women from becoming fully engaged in society, including a willingness to express an opinion, to pursue an education or a career," says Dr. Orbach.

While the study focused on girls and women, its findings raise interesting questions about the positive effects that parents can have on the self-esteem of boys as well. □

Health tips: women's health

"Twenty-five years ago," says Margaret Haworth-Brockman, executive director of Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, "it was thought better to consider men and women's health the same. Now researchers are learning how women and men respond differently to disease and treatment. Environmental, social and physical issues in people's lives make a difference; gender roles are also a factor."

Pregnancy and childbirth

- One thousand new babies are born every day in Canada. With today's celebrities returning to their pre-pregnancy shape in what seems like minutes, moms are facing unnecessary body image pressure. To counteract this and other stresses of pregnancy, the *Women's Health Matters Pregnancy*

website www.womenshealthmatters.ca suggests gentle exercise, healthy lifestyle changes (like avoiding alcohol) and building relaxation time into your schedule.

Women and alcohol

- According to the *Women's Addiction Foundation*, many women suffer from both depression and alcohol misuse, as the roots of women's depression are also often factors in substance use. These include abuse, isolation, grief, ill health, discrimination, family problems, financial stress or lack of spiritual grounding. For optimum health, women should not have more than one drink per day.

What is perimenopause?

- About 20 per cent of Canadian women are now in the age range (35-55) in which

perimenopause occurs. "Estrogen levels rise in our late thirties," says Dr. Jerilynn Prior of the Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research, "and become erratically high through most of perimenopause." Symptoms can include breast soreness, increased flow and premenstrual mood changes; migraines and insomnia may be experienced for the first time.

Women's health improved by social relationships

- Are there people in your life you can turn to just to talk or to share a happy or stressful event in your life? Particularly for women, social support improves mental and physical health. In fact, in a study conducted by the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, women surveyed named social support as one of the top three factors affecting their health.



Seniors fall hard

Programs aim to reduce hazards

BY JANE MUNDY

Over one-third of seniors fall at least once each year, resulting in the number one cause of fatal injuries among this demographic. And yet, falls are among the most preventable causes of mortality.

Olive Bryanton at the PEI Centre on Health and Aging reports that in PEI alone, "\$28 million each year is spent in falls and \$10 million of that amount is a direct cost of senior injuries attributed to falls." Nationally, the

cost of seniors falls is \$2.4 billion.

Dr. Vicky Scott of the B.C. Ministry of Health's Injury Research and Prevention Unit, says, "Seniors are reluctant to talk about falls -- they are embarrassed and worry about being placed in a nursing home."

Initiatives to combat this issue include a new pilot study - Strategies and Actions for Independent Living (SAIL) - that is training community health workers to encourage seniors

to identify their risks. The workers then offer guidance to mitigate those risks.

"Our pilot study had a 40 per cent reduction of falls over six months," says Dr. Scott, "...it's all about keeping the senior in the community, and as independent as possible."

SAIL and similar projects have led to a \$24-million reduction in hospital costs in B.C. from fall-related injuries over the last five years. □

Health tips: reduce falls

Reduce risk factors

- It's important to raise seniors' awareness about hazardous environments and remind them of their physical limitations, including those caused by medications, particularly tranquilizers and sleeping pills.

Improve Prevention

- Report falls and their circumstances to your

doctor to help determine medical contributors, such as poor blood pressure.

- Exercise to promote balance, muscle strength and reaction time.
- Make homes and public environments elder-friendly. Bathrooms should have grab bars. Stairs need handrails and adequate lighting.
- Boost nutrition: A diet that includes

protein, Vitamin D and calcium supplements will promote muscle and bone strength.

- Obtain guidance: Occupational therapists can assess a senior's home environment and offer advice on how to adapt to suit individual limitations. Information is also available online at www.injuryresearch.bc.ca.
- Get Protected: Osteoporosis sufferers are more likely to sustain a fracture if they fall. Hip protectors - shields that fit into undergarments - provide protection in case of a fall.

Health and Aboriginal communities

BY LORI BAMBER

The National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) logo represents the elements of Aboriginal life and health. A metaphor for the circle of life, it symbolizes the four directions and the unity of all peoples; a fish and a plant represent land and water - "the two things that have sustained and healed Aboriginal Peoples since the beginning of time." While these symbols may seem distant from modern health care, according to James Lamouche, acting manager of Communications and Policy Research, recognition of their importance is in fact integral to the delivery of "culturally competent care."

"Ten years ago," Mr. Lamouche says, "we identified the need for an additional 10,000 Abo-

iginal health-care professionals in the system. We're a long way from that even now, and that work needs to continue. Ideally, the system itself would represent the people it intends to serve, and recognize that traditional Aboriginal healing methods not only have efficacy and usefulness in their own right but also improve the likelihood that Aboriginal people will participate in the system."

NAHO has produced a series of documents around the idea of culturally competent care, using ideas that have worked successfully in New Zealand and Australia. One of its mandates is the support and protection of traditional healing, which it addresses, in part, by organizing meet-

ings involving elders and healers across the country.

"The knowledge we get back from that process doesn't always have a lot to do with the system's view of health care," says Mr. Lamouche. "Our elders and healers tell us that the changes that will help the health of all of our people are about land, language and relationships. It is those elements that form the basis of any improvements in and protection of traditional healing practices."

Successful delivery of health care to Aboriginal communities also requires investment in the foundations of good health, transportation, sanitation, housing and water. □

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Canadian Child Care Federation



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Sexuality/Reproductive Health
Canadian Federation for Sexual Health



Diabetes
Canadian Diabetes Association



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Environment and Health
WHO/PAHO Collaborating Centre at the Centre hospitalier universitaire de Québec



Women
The New Women's College Hospital



Healthy Eating
Dietitians of Canada



Workplace Health
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