

## “Hard Facts About Women’s Heart Health”



### Overview of Project:

The Federated Women’s Institutes of Canada has adopted the above topic as the Project for the Triennium 2009-2012

The **purpose** of the Project is to educate women that heart disease is their **#1 health threat**, as most women fail to make the connection between its risk factors and their personal risk of developing Heart Disease.

### Information Available:

We encourage Branches to use the information included or use the **The Heart Truth’s Community Action Kit** available on-line at [www.hearttruth.ca](http://www.hearttruth.ca). The Community Action Kit contains video documentaries, a PowerPoint presentation with speaking notes, a sample media alert and sample newsletter article. The Heart and Stroke Foundation also has free information, brochures and booklets available at their local offices.

The **Red Dress** is the symbol of the Heart and Stroke Foundation’s **The Heart Truth** campaign which aims to raise awareness that heart disease and stroke are the leading cause of death for Canadian women. The first Friday in February is **National Wear Red Day** and we encourage all WI members to follow this tradition.

### Action Plan:

The information sessions can be held in any form Branches wish. We ask that you stress at each session that we are not Health Care Professionals and are not there to give medical advice. However, we ask that you have a Medical Person there if at all possible, to answer any questions.

We would like to remind Branches to:

- Keep the Media informed - a Media person could be in attendance as a Guest Celebrity.
- A Heart and Stroke survivor could be asked to tell her story.
- Branches could have a Red Dress Fashion Show or organize a luncheon or an afternoon tea with **red** tea, heart-shaped cookies and sandwiches. Everyone in attendance could wear red and display a heart somewhere on their person.
- Perhaps you could start the presentation with a quiz. (Example included)
- Be sure to present **The Heart Truth** information at **All** sessions! (Included)
- But most of all - **Have fun with the project and keep your Provincial Office or Executive Officer informed of your activities!**

## HARD FACTS ABOUT WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH

Some of you have reached that time in life where you are thinking about retiring, to having lots of time to spend gardening, traveling, spending time with the grandchildren, etc. Hot flashes are behind you and you are looking forward to your free time. Your health is good, a few aches and pains, but mostly you are in good shape! You probably don't think about heart disease, but it is time you did! Estrogen tends to help protect women from heart disease before menopause –but not always. Women with risk factors before menopause have an increased risk of developing heart disease.

Heart disease and stroke remain the leading cause of death for Canadian women. About one in three women will receive treatment for heart disease. Most women don't know this!

The Federated Women's Institutes of Canada has taken this topic as the 2009-2012 Triennial Project and are joining the Heart and Stroke Foundation in their Heart Truth Campaign by educating women to take action to prevent and control the risk factors of heart disease and stroke.

### WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?    WHAT IS STROKE?

**Heart Disease** is damage to the heart. The most common type is coronary artery disease. Angina is caused by reduced blood supply and oxygen to the heart. Heart Attack is caused by reduction or stoppage of blood supply/oxygen.

**Stroke** is the sudden loss of brain function. It is caused by interruption of blood flow to the brain or rupture of blood vessels in the brain. Four out of five strokes are caused by reduced or stopped blood flow.

Both heart disease and stroke share many of the same root causes and many of the prevention methods will give you double the health benefits by protecting you against both diseases. Making lifestyle changes and taking action to improve your health can reduce your risk of these diseases by as much as 80 percent.

### REDUCING YOUR RISK:

**1. BE SMOKE FREE.** Smoking and second hand smoke contribute to hardening of the arteries that can lead to heart disease and stroke. Smokers have nearly double the risk of certain types of stroke. The good news is that just 24 hours after quitting, your chance of heart attack decreases, and after one year your risk of heart attack is half that of a smoker.

**2. LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL.** About 40 percent of Canadian women between the ages of 18 and 74 have cholesterol levels that are too high. You should discuss with your doctor where your levels should be and what you can do to reduce your risk. You can reduce your cholesterol and triglyceride levels by being smoke-free, being physically active and maintaining a healthy diet.

**3. MANAGE YOUR WEIGHT.** More than half of Canadian women aged 18 and over are overweight or obese. Women who are 30 percent over their healthy body weight are two to three

times more likely to develop heart disease. Women who are apple-shaped or who carry the most weight around their middle could be at a greater risk than women who are pear-shaped.

**Measuring your waist and regularly checking your Body Mass Index are good ways to monitor your risk of heart disease. Visit [www.heartandstroke.ca/healthywaists](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthywaists) to learn how to take a proper waist measurement and what the numbers mean.**

**4. KEEP PHYSICALLY ACTIVE.** The shocking fact is that close to all women over the age of 12 are physically inactive. Yet physical activity is one of the most effective ways to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

**5. KNOW AND CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE.** High blood pressure - the leading cause of stroke - affects one in five Canadians. Monitoring and controlling your blood pressure can reduce your risk of stroke by up to 40 per cent, your risk of heart disease by 50 percent and your risk of heart failure by up to 25 per cent. High blood pressure can damage blood vessel walls, causing weakening or scarring that promotes the build-up of plaque and the blocking of arteries. It's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly and to discuss with your healthcare provider what your numbers mean. If you need to need to lower your blood pressure, they may recommend that you:

- ▶ **eat a balanced diet that is rich in vegetables and fruit, lower in fat and sodium**
- ▶ **achieve and maintain a healthy weight**
- ▶ **limit alcohol intake**
- ▶ **increase physical activity**
- ▶ **reduce stress**
- ▶ **take blood pressure medication as directed**

**6. REDUCE STRESS.** Women can lead stressful lives as they juggle the responsibilities of work and family life. But taking the time to relax, unwind and enjoy life is actually an important way to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. People who experience high stress levels, anxiety and depression may make lifestyle choices, such as avoiding exercise or eating poorly, that increase their risk of high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure or narrowing of the arteries. **You can try lowering your stress levels by:**

- ▶ **identifying the causes of stress in your life**
- ▶ **being physically active**
- ▶ **sharing your feelings with friends, family or co-workers**
- ▶ **taking time for yourself - get out and do something you enjoy!**
- ▶ **asking for help if you feel you can't cope - talk to your doctor about treatment for anxiety or depression**

**7. MANAGE YOUR DIABETES.** Diabetes plays a big role in determining a woman's risk for heart disease and stroke. Women with diabetes are three times more likely to get heart disease than women who don't - in fact, almost four out of five people with diabetes will die of a heart attack or stroke. **If you have diabetes, you can manage your risk for heart disease and stroke by:**

- ▶ **controlling your blood sugar and following the advice of your doctor**

- ▶ **eating a balanced diet with less fat and more high fibre foods and complex carbohydrates**
- ▶ **achieving and maintaining a healthy weight**
- ▶ **being more physically active**

**8. REDUCE YOUR ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION.** Drinking too much of any type of alcohol can increase your blood pressure and contribute to the development of heart disease and stroke. You may have heard that alcohol is good for your heart. There is some evidence that people who drink moderately have a somewhat lower risk of heart disease and stroke than those who do not drink or who drink excessively. However, if you really want to have an impact on your heart health, you're better off eating a healthy diet, being physically active most days of the week and being smoke-free. If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one or two standard drinks a day, women should limit themselves to a weekly maximum of nine drinks.

### **WHAT IS YOUR RISK OF HAVING A HEART ATTACK OR STROKE?**

The items listed above are things that you can do to reduce the chance of having a heart attack or stroke. However there are risk factors that you cannot change. Some of these are:

- ▶ **Getting Older.** As you age, your risk of heart disease and stroke increases. After menopause, women are at a greater risk of heart disease. Talk to your healthcare provider about any problems.
- ▶ **Family History.** Your risk of heart disease goes up if a person related to you had heart disease before age 55, or in the case of female relatives, before menopause. You can't change your family history, but you can and should do something about other things that increase your risk.

### **WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

#### **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, pain may be more vague.
- chest pain that is brought on with exertion and goes away with rest.

##### **Shortness of Breath**

- difficulty breathing

##### **Nausea**

- indigestion

- vomiting

#### Sweating

- cool, clammy skin

#### Fear

- anxiety
- denial

*Signs may be mild or severe*

### **WARNING SIGNS OF A 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 in 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 signs.

### **WHAT TO DO:**

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW EXPERIENCES ANY OF THESE WARNING SIGNS, CALL 9-1-1 OR THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE NUMBER IN YOUR AREA IMMEDIATELY. DO NOT DELAY!**

*This information has been taken from "HeartSmart™ Women: A guide to living with and preventing heart disease and stroke," "The Changing Face of Heart Disease" from the Heart and Stroke Foundation and "Heart Disease: Let's Talk About It! A Guide for Women in Midlife" from The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.*

*Further information can be obtained from [www.thehearttruth.ca](http://www.thehearttruth.ca)*

## “Hard Facts About Women’s Heart Health”

### Quiz

#### Questions and Answers:

1. Is there a difference between Angina and a heart attack?  
Yes or No  
Answer: Yes, Angina is a result of limited blood flow to the heart and a heart attack can occur when there is no blood flow to the heart muscle.
2. Is vomiting a warning signal of heart attack?  
Yes or No  
Answer: Yes, nausea, shortness of breath, sweating and fear are all Warning signals of heart attack. Signs may be mild or severe.
3. Is smoking a risk factor of heart disease?  
Yes or No  
Answer: Yes, smoking increases your risk of developing heart disease and stroke and you can cut your risk in half just one year after you quit.
4. Women’s risk for heart disease and stroke starts to rise between ages 30 to 50, 40 to 60 or 50 to 70?  
Answer: Age 40 to 60 is the time when a woman’s risk of heart disease and stroke starts to rise, however, early prevention can save lives.
5. Lifestyle can reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke by as much as 50 per cent, 60 pre cent, 60 pre cent or 80 pre cent?  
Answer: Making lifestyle changes can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by as much as 80 per cent. Positive change in awareness can save lives.
6. Can you list three lifestyle changes that reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke?  
Answer: 1. Quit smoking, 2. Check your blood pressure  
3. Exercise and eat right
7. Five warning signs of **heart attack** are?  
Answer: 1. Chest pain or discomfort, 2. Pain in the arm, neck, jaw or back, 3. Nausea, 4. Sweating or clammy skin, 5. Difficulty breathing.
8. Five warning signs of **stroke** are?  
Answer: 1. Weakness or Numbness, 2. Trouble speaking, 3. Vision problems, 4. severe headache, 5. dizziness.

**If you experience ANY of these warning signs, call 9-1-1 or the emergency response number in your area immediately. DO NO DELAY!**