

Choose Well. Stay Healthy.



Investing in your most valuable possession



Ask almost anyone to name their most valuable possession and health will be at the top of the list. Yet research here in Alberta, across North America and around the world shows that there is more each one of us could be doing to stay healthy.

Choose Well. Stay Healthy. reminds you and your loved ones of important choices you can make to invest in your health. We look at some simple steps that are known to modify the risk of developing what health professionals call long lasting or chronic diseases.

Given our busy lives, however, one of the biggest challenges can be weaving healthy choices into every day. Read on, we hope you find tips and suggestions that make sense for you.

Chronic disease: the game changer

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, represent 63 per cent of all deaths in the world.

What is chronic disease?

When health care professionals talk about chronic disease, they mean illnesses that develop slowly over time and patients usually have the condition for life. They affect people of all ages but are more common among older adults.

Inside you'll find brief explanations of the major chronic diseases. These descriptions are taken from reliable sources noted in the articles and you can find more detailed information about disease conditions, symptoms, risk factors and prevention by contacting the organizations or websites mentioned in this report.

What's Inside

Let's talk risk.....	2
Chronic disease	
Heart disease & stroke	2
Respiratory disease.....	3
Diabetes	3
Cancer	3
Protecting your assets	4
Bank on activity	5
Great returns from a healthy diet	6
What you gain by quitting smoking	7
Heavy drinking carries heavy risks.....	7
About the HQCA	8
We want to hear from you.....	8

Hedging your bets against chronic disease

There is both good and bad news about chronic disease. The bad news is that chronic diseases are on the rise and have a major impact on the health of Albertans. As more people suffer with these lasting diseases the more it costs to provide treatment.

The good news is that chronic diseases are largely preventable. Most of us have the power to lower our risk of getting chronic diseases by making changes in our behaviour in the following four areas:

- ▶ leading an active life
- ▶ eating a healthy diet
- ▶ moderating alcohol consumption and
- ▶ not smoking

The articles inside outline things you can do to help prevent, delay or minimize the effects of chronic conditions. Read on and learn more about how small changes can lead to big returns on your investment in your health.

Choose Well. Stay Healthy.

Let’s talk risk

How do we know whether or not we have or are at risk of developing a chronic disease? The best way is to talk to your health care professionals about your medical history, your current health and your lifestyle. Each one of us is different and many factors, including our age and things we have inherited, shape our individual risks.

Research tells us that about 4 out of 5 Canadians have at least one modifiable risk factor for chronic disease. In other words, most of us can change a behaviour or lifestyle choice to help prevent, modify or lower our risks of developing these life-long conditions.

For example, we know that tobacco and excessive alcohol use, poor diet, a lack of physical activity and being a lot overweight (obese) contribute to several major chronic diseases. The chart below shows how modifiable risks are linked to different chronic diseases.



Chronic disease

Modifiable risk factors and their association with chronic diseases

	Cardiovascular disease*	Diabetes	Some cancers	Arthritis	Mental Illness	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
Tobacco	✓	✓	✓			✓
Alcohol	✓		✓		✓**	
Nutrition	✓	✓	✓			
Physical Inactivity	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Obesity	✓	✓	✓	✓		

*including heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke
**substance abuse
Source: Government of Canada. Chronic Disease Risk Factor Atlas; 2008

Eliminating risk pays

The WHO has estimated that if the major risk factors for chronic disease were eliminated, at least 80 per cent of all heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes would be prevented, and more than 40 per cent of cancer cases would be prevented.

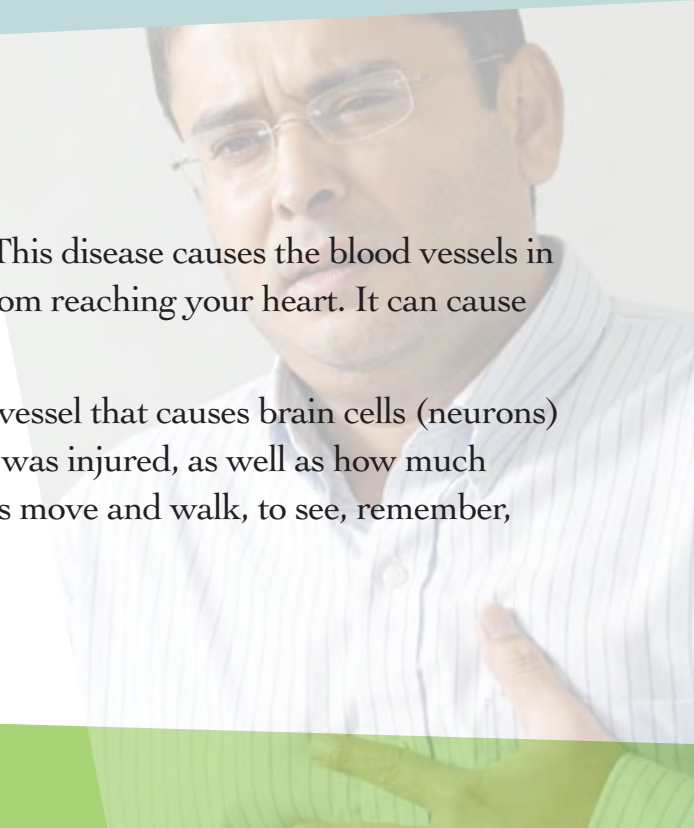
– World Health Organization

Heart disease and stroke

The most common chronic heart disease is coronary artery disease (CAD). This disease causes the blood vessels in your heart to become blocked or narrowed, preventing oxygen-rich blood from reaching your heart. It can cause chest pain (called angina) or even a heart attack.

A stroke is a sudden loss of brain function that is caused by a blocked blood vessel that causes brain cells (neurons) in the affected area to die. The effects of a stroke depend on where the brain was injured, as well as how much damage occurred. A stroke can impact your ability to do many things such as move and walk, to see, remember, speak, reason and read and write.

More information: www.heartandstroke.com



Choose Well. Stay Healthy.

Respiratory disease

Chronic respiratory diseases affect the airways—the breathing tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs—and other structures of the lung. Among the most common of these diseases are asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

These diseases make it harder to breathe. The airways of people with asthma are extra sensitive and can become inflamed or go into spasm leaving less room for the air to pass through.

COPD includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema and is often caused by smoking. COPD slowly damages your airways. They become inflamed and partly blocked by mucus causing coughing and shortness of breath during low intensity activity.

More information: www.lung.ca or www.asthma.ca



Diabetes

Here's how the Canadian Diabetes Association describes diabetes. Your body gets energy by making glucose (sugar) from foods like bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, milk and fruit. To use this glucose, your body needs insulin. Insulin is a hormone that helps your body control the level of glucose in your blood.

Diabetes is a disease in which your pancreas does not produce enough insulin (type 1), or your body does not properly use the insulin it makes (type 2). This leads to high levels of glucose in the blood, which can damage organs, blood vessels and nerves.

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in adults. About 90 per cent of those with diabetes have this type. This type can be prevented or delayed by looking after your health.

More information: www.diabetes.ca



Cancer

Cancer is a disease that starts in our cells according to the Canadian Cancer Society. Our bodies are made up of millions of cells, grouped together to form tissues and organs such as muscles and bones, the lungs and the liver. Genes inside each cell order it to grow, work, reproduce and die. Normally, our cells obey these orders and we remain healthy. But sometimes the instructions get mixed up, causing the cells to form lumps or tumours, or spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system to other parts of the body.

More information:
www.cancer.ca/Alberta-NWT



Choose Well. Stay Healthy.



Protecting your assets

As one of your most important assets, your health is well worth protecting. There are many different healthy lifestyle choices that you can make that are known to benefit your health and well being. They are:

- ▶ leading an active life
- ▶ eating a healthy diet
- ▶ moderating alcohol consumption and
- ▶ not smoking

We all know that learning about what we should do and actually doing it are two different things. So first let's look at some tips that will help you succeed and stay committed to the change you want to make.

Set realistic goals and start small.

To succeed, your goals must be real. If you need to eat more vegetables, rather than deciding to become a vegetarian consider having vegetables for your mid-morning and afternoon snack. Better to start slowly and work your way up. Remember one small success leads to another.

Think positively and be confident that you can change. Focus on the positive difference the change will make to you and believe in yourself. Instead of thinking about how much weight you want to lose, think about how good you will feel when it's gone. And remember every kilogram counts.

Make a plan. You know you want to be more active, but what does that mean? Create a plan that spells it out. If you haven't been active for a while you could try walking for 10 minutes a day. If you want to increase what you're already doing, how about adding 20 minutes more a week. Check out the websites in this issue for lots of good ideas.

Track your progress. The best way to know how you are doing is to keep track. Measure how far you have walked each day, write down what you eat every day, know how much alcohol you consumed this month. It's been shown that those who self-monitor their food intake lose twice as much weight as those who don't.

Be adaptable. Make sure you're open to adapting your plans. Life throws us all curve balls. If you're unable to hit the gym today, get off the bus two stops earlier instead. Remember there are many ways to stay active.

Reward yourself. Mark the milestones along the way. Preparing more salads as part of your healthy eating plan? Treat yourself to a new salad spinner as a reward for tracking what you've eaten for the last two weeks.

Get a little help from your friends. Most things are better with friends. And where change is concerned interacting with others helps with motivation.

Expect to slip up. We all do. Change takes time and effort. And dwelling on mistakes can make the difference between success and failure. So learn from what's happened and take another step in the direction you want to go.

Get enough sleep. Sleep is important. Without it we can become cranky and make poor decisions that undermine our plans for change.

Get regular check-ups with your doctor. This can help your doctor pick up early signs of chronic illness so that it can be managed before problems develop.



Choose Well. Stay Healthy.



10 minutes at a time

Getting into an active lifestyle may be easier than you think. Anything counts as long as it's at a moderate or vigorous intensity for at least 10 minutes at a time. And since labels sometimes make a difference, why not think of it as activity rather than exercise.

Start slowly, set reasonable goals and build up gradually.

Do things you enjoy. You're more likely to stick with it.

Choose recreational sports, unorganized activities or both. Variety will help keep you interested and motivated.

Walking can be done almost anywhere and is recognized as one of the safest and most effective forms of cardiovascular activity. A pedometer is a great tool to help you measure the number of steps you take each day and track your progress.

Make more movement part of your daily life.

- ▶ Sit less.
- ▶ Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- ▶ Park farther away from the entrance to the mall.

Remember, if you have a pre-existing health condition, always check with your health care professionals to find out what activity would be best for you.

Bank on activity

Regular physical activity helps improve your overall health and fitness and reduces your risk for many chronic diseases. It's definitely worth your investment of time.

The question is how active is active? The answer is simple thanks to the new *Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines* from the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP). More physical activity provides greater health benefits.

The guidelines for adults 18 to 64 years of age are shown below. You can find guidelines for other age groups (children 5-11, youth 12-17, adults 65 and older) at:

www.csep.ca/guidelines

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines

FOR ADULTS 18-64 YEARS

To achieve health benefits, adults aged 18-64 years should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

It is also beneficial to add muscle and bone strengthening activities using major muscle groups, at least 2 days a week.

More physical activity provides greater health benefits.

Moderate intensity physical activities will cause adults to sweat a little and to breathe harder, activities like brisk walking and bike riding.

Vigorous intensity physical activities will cause adults to sweat and be out of breath, activities like jogging and cross-country skiing.

Source: www.csep.ca/guidelines



Use it or lose it

Regular physical activity and higher levels of fitness allow daily tasks to be accomplished with greater ease and comfort and with less fatigue. Research shows that as much as half the functional decline between the ages of 30 and 70 is due not to aging itself but to an inactive way of life.

— *Public Health Agency of Canada*

Choose Well. Stay Healthy.

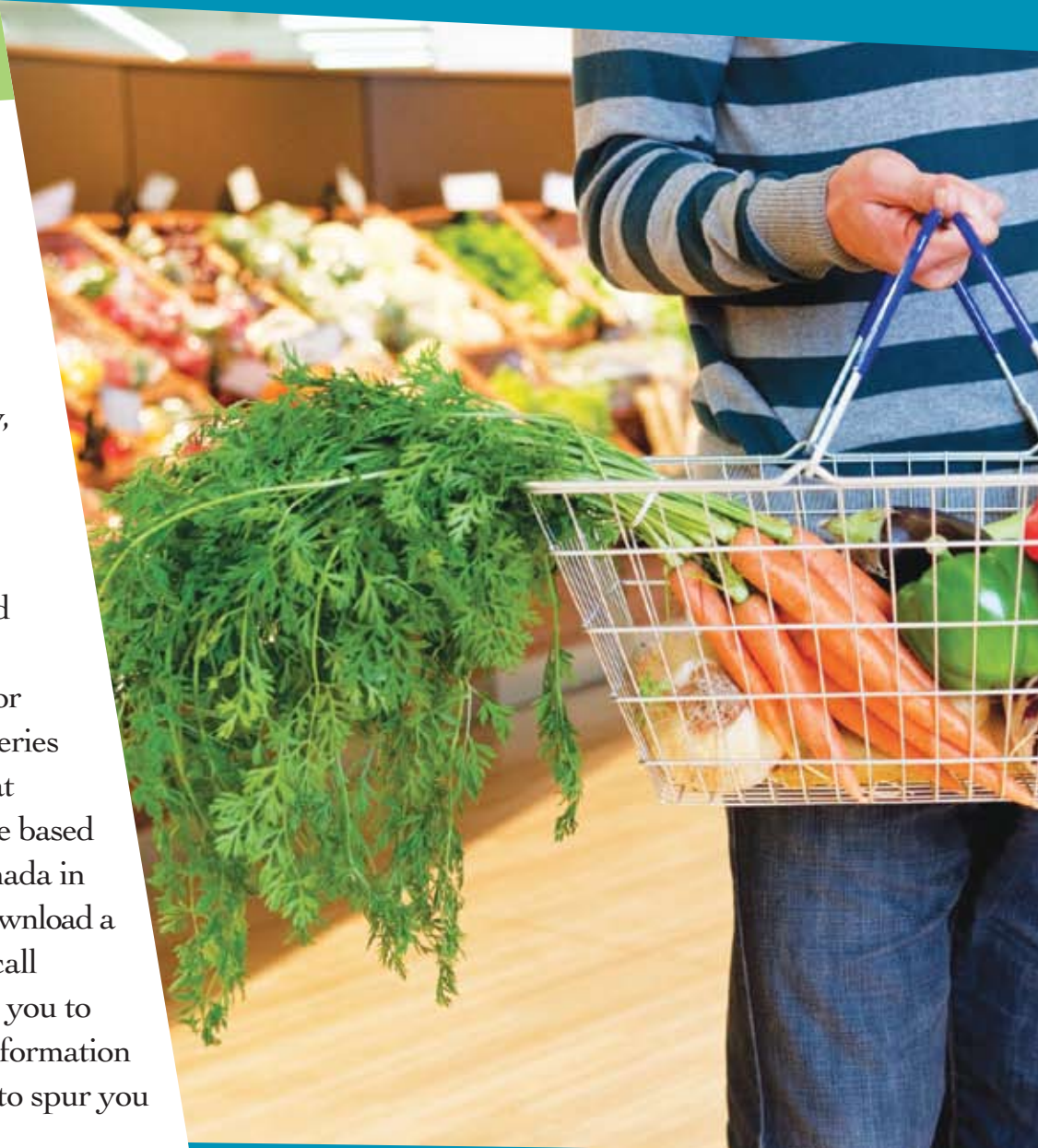
Great returns from a healthy diet

What we eat plays a major role in establishing and protecting our health and we gain great returns from a nutritious diet. Not only does it feed our vitality, it helps reduce the risks and effects of major chronic diseases.

Because we control what we put into our body, eating a healthy diet is a behaviour we can choose to maintain and improve our well being throughout our lives.

It all starts with knowing what our bodies need everyday to keep us healthy. There are many reliable sources of information on this topic. For example, the Government of Alberta offers a series of online nutrition guidelines and much more at www.healthyalberta.ca. Alberta's guidelines are based on those developed by the Government of Canada in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. You can download a copy of this guide from www.hc-sc.gc.ca or call 1-866-225-0709 to ask for one. We encourage you to explore both websites. You'll find important information and helpful tools, recipes, tips, hints and ideas to spur you on to eating nutritiously and being active.

More information: www.healthyalberta.ca
www.hc-sc.gc.ca



Stick to your plan

Most of us come up against some bumps in the road on the way to healthy choices. No need to get discouraged. Many helpful suggestions are available. Here are some tried and true tips on how to overcome the common barriers to healthy eating.

- ▶ Plan meals ahead and make a shopping list so you have nutritious foods handy and can prepare healthy meals in a hurry.
- ▶ No need to worry about healthy eating costing more. Buy fresh produce in season and freeze some for later or choose affordable canned and frozen options which are also nutritious. Stock up on staples and canned goods when they are on sale. Cut back on pre-prepared foods which are high in calories and cost more.
- ▶ If you find eating out a problem, try this. Order small or appetizer sizes. If you're with a friend, share a meal and keep the portion sizes smaller that way. Some restaurants mark healthier choices on the menu, look for those.

Daily stock and trade

Statistics Canada tells us that half of all adult Canadians don't eat the recommended daily servings of vegetables and fruits. According to *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, adult women should eat 7 to 8 servings a day and adult men 8 to 10.

The *Guide* defines a single serving as one of the following items:

- ▶ 125 mL (½ cup) fresh, frozen or canned vegetable or fruit or 100% juice
- ▶ 250 mL (1 cup) leafy raw vegetables or salad
- ▶ 1 piece of fruit

Here are some reasons why you want to eat and snack on vegetables and fruit daily:

- ▶ They may help reduce your risk of some types of cancer.
- ▶ They help keep your digestive system regular.
- ▶ They help keep your bones strong.
- ▶ They are generally low in calories and fat and rich in fibre so they can help you maintain a healthy weight.
- ▶ They are full of important nutrients like vitamins A and C, folate and minerals like potassium and magnesium as well as fibre.
- ▶ They also have compounds called phytochemicals that may help protect you against a variety of diseases like heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

Choose Well. Stay Healthy.

What you gain by quitting smoking

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and illness in Alberta according to the Lung Association of Alberta & NWT. It contributes to many diseases including these chronic ones: cardiovascular disease (heart disease, hypertension or high blood pressure, stroke), diabetes, some cancers, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Smoking is a behaviour that can be changed and the health benefits of doing so start right away according to this chart from the AlbertaQuits website.

Quitting time	Health benefits
20 minutes	Blood pressure and pulse rate decrease
8 hours	Oxygen level goes back to normal and carbon monoxide levels drop
48 hours	Chances of having a heart attack decreases and sense of smell and taste start improving
72 hours	Breathing will get easier as your bronchial tubes relax and lung capacity begins to increase
2 weeks to 3 months	Circulation improves, exercising becomes easier and lung capacity can increase by as much as 30%
6 months	Improvements in coughing, sinus congestion, tiredness, shortness of breath and colds
1 year	50% reduction in risk of smoking-related heart attack
5 years	Risk of having a stroke is now reduced to that of a non-smoker
10 years	Risk of dying from lung cancer will decrease by half
15 years	Risk of dying from a heart attack is the same as a person who has never smoked

Chronic disease costs

Albertans with chronic diseases make up about 30 per cent of the population yet they represent just over 60 per cent of costs assessed to the health care system.

–*HQCA 2009 Measuring e³ Monitoring for Success*

Free help for Albertans who want to quit

AlbertaQuits is an internet-based quit smoking service, available free-of-charge for all Albertans. You will find expert advice, online peer support, quitting strategies, email reminders and more. This information can be accessed from any computer simply by providing your postal code to verify that you are an Alberta resident.

More information:
www.albertaquits.ca
Confidential Helpline:
1-866-710-QUIT (7848)
8 am to 8 pm 7 days a week

Heavy drinking carries heavy risks

The *Chronic Disease Risk Factor Atlas* published by the Government of Canada tells us that heavy drinking is associated with increased risks of more than 60 chronic or acute conditions including cancer, gastrointestinal diseases, neurological disorders, cardiovascular disease (especially stroke) and, for pregnant women, negative impacts on the fetus.

The *Atlas* defined heavy or high-risk drinking as drinkers who report drinking 5 or more drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year.

Defining “moderate” drinking is challenging because alcohol affects everyone differently depending on factors such as gender, size and medical condition. You can access *Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines* on the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse website at www.ccsa.ca. These guidelines recommend the following limits for women and men of legal drinking age. All are advised to plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit.

	DAILY LIMIT*	WEEKLY LIMIT*
Women	2 drinks	10 drinks
Men	3 drinks	15 drinks

* a standard drink of alcohol is equal to a 12 oz. (341 ml) bottle with 5% alcohol content (beer, cider, or cooler) or 5 oz. (142 ml) glass of wine with 12% alcohol content or 1.5 oz. (43 ml) serving of 40% distilled alcohol content (rye, gin, rum, etc.).

Source: www.ccsa.ca/eng/priorities/alcohol/Canada-low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines

Albertans concerned about their alcohol use or that of someone close to them can get more information and assistance by calling the 24-hour Alberta Health Services Addiction Helpline at **1-866-332-2322**.

More information: www.ccsa.ca

Choose Well. Stay Healthy.

About the HQCA

The Health Quality Council of Alberta gathers and analyzes information and collaborates with Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Health Services, health professionals, academia and other stakeholders to translate that knowledge into practical improvements to health service quality and patient safety in the healthcare system. The HQCA operates under the *Health Quality Council of Alberta Act*.

We want to hear from you

Please take a moment to answer these questions.

1. How did you get your copy of this report?

2. Did you find the information in this issue useful?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. How could we improve our next issue?

4. What other topics would you like us to cover in future issues?

5. Other comments?

Fax, mail, email, online, tweet

Fax comments: 403.297.8258. **Mail:** Health Quality Council of Alberta
210, 811–14 Street NW, Calgary, AB T2N 2A4 **Email:** info@hqca.ca
Answer **online** at www.hqca.ca/index.php?id=129
Follow us on **Twitter** at <http://twitter.com/#!/HQCA>

Thank you for sending us your feedback.



More Copies

For more copies of *Choose Well. Stay Healthy.* go to www.hqca.ca or call our office in Calgary at 403.297.8162 or Edmonton at 780.429.3008.

References

Government of Canada. Chronic Disease Risk Factor Atlas; 2008.

HQCA. 2009 Measuring & Monitoring for Success.

World Health Organization. Preventing chronic diseases: a vital investment. Geneva; 2005.

Disclaimer: The health and medical information in this publication is not intended to take the place of advice or treatment from health care professionals. It is also not intended to substitute for the users’ relationships with their own health care providers. The Health Quality Council of Alberta is not responsible for the contents of any pages referred from this publication or its web site. None of the information in this publication may be otherwise reproduced, republished or re-disseminated in any manner or form without the prior written consent of an authorized representative of the HQCA.

www.hqca.ca