

Simple lifestyle changes can add a decade or more healthy years to the average lifespan

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Vancouver – Health prevention strategies to help Canadians achieve their optimal health potential could add a decade or more of healthy years to the average lifespan and save the economy billions of dollars as a result of reduced cardiovascular disease, says noted cardiologist Dr. Clyde Yancy.

Dr. Yancy, who will deliver the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada Lecture at the opening ceremonies of the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress in Vancouver this Sunday, will tell delegates that people who follow seven simple steps to a healthy life can expect to live an additional 40 to 50 years after the age of 50.

"Achieving these seven simple [lifestyle](#) factors gives people a 90 per cent chance of living to the age of 90 or 100, free of not only heart disease and stroke but from a number of other chronic illnesses including cancer," says Dr. Yancy, a professor of medicine and chief of cardiology at the Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. He is also the past-president of the American Heart Association.

"By following these steps, we can compress life-threatening disease into the final stages of life and maintain quality of life for the longest possible time." He predicts that, if we act now, we can reverse the tide by 2020.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, every year in Canada

about 250,000 potential years of life are lost due to heart disease and stroke, which are two of the three leading causes of death in Canada.

Canadians can achieve optimal health, says Dr. Yancy, by following these steps:

1. **GET ACTIVE:** Inactivity can shave almost four years off a person's expected [lifespan](#). People who are physically inactive are twice as likely to be at risk for heart disease or stroke.
2. **KNOW AND CONTROL CHOLESTEROL LEVELS:** Almost 40 per cent of Canadian adults have high blood cholesterol, which can lead to the build up of fatty deposits in your arteries – increasing your risk for heart disease and stroke.
3. **FOLLOW A HEALTHY DIET:** Healthy eating is one of the most important things you can do to improve your health – yet about half of Canadians don't meet the healthy eating recommendations.
4. **KNOW AND CONTROL BLOOD PRESSURE:** High blood pressure – often called a 'silent killer' because it has no warning signs or symptoms – affects one in five Canadians. By knowing and controlling your blood pressure, you can cut your risk of stroke by up to 40 per cent and the risk of heart attack by up to 25 per cent.
5. **ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT:** Almost 60 per cent of Canadian adults are either overweight or obese – major risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Being obese can reduce your life span by almost four years.
6. **MANAGE DIABETES:** By 2016 an estimated 2.4 million Canadians will live with diabetes. Diabetes increases the risk of high blood pressure, atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries), coronary artery disease, and stroke, particularly if your blood sugar levels are poorly controlled.

7. **BE TOBACCO FREE:** More than 37,000 Canadians die prematurely each year due to tobacco use, and thousands of non-smokers die each year from exposure to second-hand smoke. As soon as you become smoke-free, your risk of heart disease and stroke begins to decrease. After 15 years, your risk will be nearly that of a non-smoker.

A call for focused prevention strategies

While this goal of optimal health has been achieved by fewer than 10 per cent of the population, "it demonstrates the striking potential that prevention has if it is broadly embraced," says Dr. Yancy. "We know how to prevent heart disease and stroke – we now need to build the tools to empower our citizens to manage their risk and prevent heart disease."

Dr. Yancy calls on governments to invest in steady and focused prevention strategies. He says that necessary initiatives include a change in current sodium policies, continued progress in tobacco control initiatives, increased green space, and health education.

"Healthy living is key to preventing heart disease and stroke," says Bobbe Wood, president of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. "The Foundation is committed to raising awareness about heart health and to promoting public policies that facilitate healthy lifestyles and communities."

She says that the Foundation will continue to build on partnerships and policies that have led to a significant reduction of trans fats in the Canadian food supply; stronger tobacco control initiatives; healthy community design; and a continued reduction in the amount of salt in our food products, which has been achieved in part through Health Check™, the Foundation's flagship food information program.

Dr. Yancy adds that improved access to health care that focuses on prevention and control of important risk factors including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes is also key.

Raising the alarm over looming costs of treating heart disease

Dr. Yancy will also raise the alarm over the looming cost of treating heart disease now and in the future. With predictions that the direct medical cost of treating heart disease in the U.S. alone could climb to \$818 billion in 2030, he says there is a health and economic imperative for governments and societies around the world to embrace prevention strategies.

Heart disease and stroke cost the Canadian economy more than \$20.9 billion every year in physician services, hospital costs, lost wages and decreased productivity.

"The opportunity for prevention is not an unrealistic expectation," says Dr. Yancy. "Over the past 40 years the rates of heart disease and stroke have steadily declined." The rate has declined in Canada by 70 per cent since the mid-1950s. In the last decade alone, the rate has declined by 25 per cent.

Unfortunately, says Dr. Yancy, these benefits may be short-lived if the burden of risk, specifically obesity and diabetes, continues to grow, especially in children. "We need to act now."

Canadians can take a personalized My Heart&Stroke Risk Assessment™ to find out how their age, family history, and medical conditions affect their heart health at heartandstroke.ca/risk.

Provided by Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

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