

# HEALTH

## MYTHS & FACTS



**There are lots of things we say to ourselves to justify the lifestyle choices we make. In order to have more healthy behaviours and fewer unhealthy behaviours, we need to be more informed.**

For every reason you come up with not to change, there is usually a better reason to change your behaviour.

### SMOKING

#### MYTH:

**I might as well keep smoking because if I quit I'll gain weight.**

#### FACT:

Nicotine reduces a smoker's appetite and increases their metabolism. As a result, when you quit smoking, you might gain some weight. In fact, some studies show that quitting smoking results in an average weight gain of 5 kg. This doesn't have to happen though.

To help prevent weight gain, substitute physical activity, healthy snacks, or nicotine replacements (e.g., nicotine gum) in place of smoking. These smoking replacements not only help prevent weight gain, but also help stop the cravings.

Others find it difficult to change their eating and physical activity patterns while they are trying to quit. For these people, it's important to remember that the benefits of quitting smoking far outweigh the negative effects of the small amount of weight gain which may occur. Plus if you gain weight, you can focus on losing it once you are sure you have quit smoking for good.

### ALCOHOL

#### MYTH:

**Drinking alcohol is good for your heart health.**

#### FACT:

Alcohol is related to over 60 medical conditions. In fact, the more you drink the higher your risk of developing an alcohol-related chronic disease like heart disease. Heavy drinking (drinking five or more drinks on one occasion at least 12 times a year) can lead to many social problems plus the following health problems:

- High blood pressure
- Increased blood clotting
- Irregular heart rhythm
- Decreased HDL ("good") cholesterol levels

The risks of drinking far outweigh the benefits. Therefore, if you don't drink, don't start.

If you drink,  
follow the  
Low-Risk  
Drinking  
Guidelines  
[www.lrdg.net](http://www.lrdg.net)



## HEALTHY EATING

### MYTH:

**Fresh fruits and vegetables are too expensive and go bad quickly.**

### FACT:

Though fresh fruits and vegetables may cost more to buy when they are out of season, they are cheap to buy when they are in-season. Buy local fruits and vegetables from your grocery store or farmers market when they are on sale or in-season. You can either purchase small amounts of fruits and vegetables so you won't have to worry about them spoiling before you use them, or buy larger amounts and preserve them for a later time. You can also buy frozen and canned fruit and vegetables, which are low in sodium and sugar. Frozen fruits and vegetables are just as nutritious as fresh produce and can cost a lot less.

## STRESS

### MYTH:

**Stress is a big part of my life. There is nothing I can do to change that.**

### FACT:

Stress will always be a part of life. There are things you can do to change the amount of stress you have in your life and things you can do to manage the stressors that you can't change.

- Focus on the things you can change (e.g., needing more money to pay bills) and make changes to reduce stressors in those areas (e.g., cutting back on luxuries such as take-out food and weekend spending to save extra money).
- Use good time management and do more important jobs before finishing less important tasks or having leisure time.
- Don't take on too many tasks; you are only one person and you can only do so much.
- Use positive coping strategies (e.g., exercise, meditation, peer support or counselling) to deal with the stress you have no control over (e.g., the possibility of getting laid off).

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### MYTH:

**I'm busy at work so I don't have to be active outside of work.**

### FACT:

Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living recommends taking part in three different types of activities to keep your body healthy. Endurance activities (e.g., walking, cycling, tennis) should be done 4 to 7 days a week for 60 minutes to improve your lung, heart, and circulatory health. Flexibility activities (e.g., gardening, stretching exercises, golf) should be done 4 to 7 days a week to keep your muscles relaxed and your joints flexible. Strength activities (e.g., lifting and carrying groceries, climbing stairs, doing a weight training routine) should be done 2 to 4 days a week to help keep your muscles and bones strong. Done properly, all types and amounts of physical activity count, but you most likely need to be active away from your job to get all of the mental and physical benefits to your health.

## HEALTHY WEIGHTS

### MYTH:

**Skipping meals is a good way to lose weight and keep it off.**

### FACT:

If you skip meals on a regular basis, your body may be tricked into slowing itself down to save energy, sending mixed messages to your body. This means that even though you may be putting less energy (calories) into your body, your body is also using less energy. People who skip meals also tend to overeat or eat unhealthy foods when they do eat. As a result of these factors, people who skip meals may actually put on weight, rather than take it off. The trick to healthy weight loss is to eat a balanced diet with regular meals and snacks throughout the day. Try and burn about 500 kcal more in a day than you take in through physical activity. By doing this, you can safely lose about 0.5 kg/week.



#### Key References:

- Chiolero, A., Faeh, D., Paccaud, F., & Cornuz, J. (2008). Consequences of smoking for body weight, body fat distribution, and insulin resistance. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 87(4), 801-809.
- Health Canada. (2008). *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*. Ottawa, ON: Author.
- Ma, Y., Bertone, E. R., Stanek, E. J., 3rd, Reed, G. W., Hebert, J. R., Cohen, N. L., et al. (2003). Association between eating patterns and obesity in a free-living US adult population. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 158(1), 85-92.
- Novello, A. C. (1990). Surgeon general's report on the health benefits of smoking cessation. *Public Health Reports (Washington, D.C.: 1974)*, 105(6), 545-548.
- O'Keefe, J. H., Bybee, K. A., & Lavie, C. J. (2007). Alcohol and cardiovascular health: The razor-sharp double-edged sword. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 50(11), 1009-1014. doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2007.04.089