

Making Healthy Choices for Mind and Body in 2012 *With Help from Local Health Units*

The bad news is that in Northeastern Ontario we have much higher rates of chronic diseases and mood disorders. The good news is that these rates can be reduced by making healthy lifestyle changes.

Through a yearly forum and the work of our Health Professionals Advisory Committee, the North East LHIN is working on improving access to care for patients with chronic diseases, as well as preventing rates of disease. It's also creating a web page so providers can share best practices.

Louise Paquette, North East LHIN CEO notes, "Northerners can take steps – big and small – to help improve our health and cut our risks of chronic disease." Resolutions are best kept when a person makes small but concrete changes, so the North East LHIN approached our partners in health units across our region to give Northerners a few ways to live healthier in 2012.

Of course, living healthy is not only about the body but the mind – as you'll hear from the Timiskaming Public Health Unit, one of the few LHIN-funded public health units in Ontario to offer Mental Health and Addiction Services. The importance of making connections with our families, friends and communities was another theme that came forward in the advice from Sudbury and Algoma Health Units.

Think about Improving Opportunities for Health in Your Community

Health starts in the communities in which we live, work, learn, and play. Our communities represent great opportunities and resources for action to improve health and reduce health inequities. The Sudbury and District Health Unit is encouraging Northerners in 2012 to "think beyond personal lifestyle changes – think about improving opportunities for health," explained Désirée Venne, Public Health Nurse. We can make decisions and shape our communities in ways that increase everyone's opportunities to be healthy. The goal is to create the conditions that allow people to make healthy choices.

A couple of examples:

- **Get to know your neighbours** and support those who might be going through a difficult time.
- **Become involved** with local boards, community action networks, and other organizations to encourage the creation of green spaces, affordable healthy foods, and other projects in your community.
- **Campaign for better bicycle trails or sidewalks** in your community and support organizations that do this work.

Walk Your Way to Wellness

Walking is an underrated but very accessible and affordable form of exercise with many health benefits, said Venne. All you need is a good pair of shoes! Besides the physical benefits of walking, research has shown it is also a great way to reduce stress. Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for adults recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more to achieve health benefits.



To meet the Health Guideline consider **30 minutes of brisk walking five days a week**. “And remember a little more is always better,” said Venne. You should be able to carry a conversation but be a little short of breath.

Eat Well

Only 42% of Northerners report eating five or more fruit and veggies. This is really low, considering for adults, the Canada Food Guide recommends 7 to 10 servings. Most of us could do with more green ... or red or yellow stuff in our diet. “Fruit and vegetables are chock full of vitamins, minerals and fibre,” said Lisa Atchison, Registered Dietitian with the Algoma Public Health. “They also help to protect against chronic diseases.”

When we eat together, we also tend to eat better, so Atchison is urging families to make a point of scheduling more sit down meals each week. Research has shown that children take in better nutrition – and more vegetables – when eating with their parents.

Home cooked meals also tend to contain less fat and salt than those found in a box or restaurant. “Not only is it better for you but it’s also a great way to connect as a family,” Atchinson said. “Involve the whole family in meal preparation – it’s a great way for children to learn how to cook.”



- **Eat two more fruit or vegetables a day:** Every meal and snack should include at least one serving from this food group. At dinner, aim to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.
- **Sit down to one or two more family or friends dinners a week.**

Get Involved: It's good for your mind

Ryan Peters, Manager of Communications and Mental Health and Addictions at the Timiskaming Health Unit, spoke about the benefits for our mental health found in connecting with people through social recreation or volunteering. “We often talk about mental health versus mental illness,” Peters said. “Being involved through activities or volunteering is important for everybody. You need a place to exercise your mind, just like you exercise your body.”

While connecting with others is important for everybody, it's even more so for those with mental illness. In addition to one-on-one and group counseling, the health unit has a drop-in centre in New Liskeard for those with mental illness, which is member-run and led by Addiction and Mental Health Clinicians. It operates three days a week, with a weekly luncheon. Besides crafts and other activities, the members also make a point in getting involved in community events. For the reopening of their community's curling centre, they spent considerable time crafting decorations and working with the curling club members to set up for the event.

- **Connect with others through recreation or volunteering to foster a healthy mind.**

Be Driven to Quit – Even for Just One Month

Smoking is the leading cause of death in Canada and is strongly linked with chronic diseases and cancers. But if you won't quit for your health alone, Lindsey Lair, a Community Health Promoter with the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, is asking you to consider the chance of winning a car, dream vacation or cash prize for giving up the habit for the month of March. The Driven to Quit contest – presented by the Canadian Cancer Society – asks participants to register online and to choose a quit buddy to help you go tobacco-free for the month (www.driventoquit.ca). Lair suggests in preparation for the contest to taper off your tobacco use and adjust social patterns of behaviour linked to smoking. The physical benefits will be felt quickly, she said. "Within 72 hours of quitting your lung capacity improves," Lair added. After nine months a person will cough less and likely feel sinus improvement.

Work places can get involved by encouraging the formation of "walking groups" to replace the lure of the smoke break.

Background on the North East Region:

Poor Health Behaviours:

- **Carrying too much weight:** – Almost 70% of North East Ontario men (68%) are overweight or obese and 54 % of women (averaged together it works out to 61% of Northern adults). This is considerably higher than the provincial average of 52% for both sexes; 60% for men and 44% for women.
- **More Smokers:** 25% light up daily compared to the provincial average of 19%.
- **Drinkers:** 20% report themselves as heavy drinkers compared to 16% provincially.

Higher Rates of Chronic Disease and Mood Disorders:

- **Rates of Heart Disease:** In the North East, we have more deaths –115 people per 100,000 dying – compared to the provincial average of 87.
- **Diabetes:** Along the Coast, where many of our Aboriginal/First Nations and Métis people live, one in four have diabetes -- much higher than the provincial average of 7%. Across the North East we also average higher at 8%.
- **Asthma:** About 9.4% have this condition which restricts breathing – a point higher than the provincial average of 8.3%.
- **Mood disorders:** 7.9% of those living in the North East, compared to the provincial average of 6.8%.

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