

HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

# WORKPLACE HEALTH

June  
is **STROKE** Month

June is a great month to promote stroke prevention within your workplace. Stroke is the third leading cause of death in Canada, costing the Canadian economy \$3.6 billion a year in physician services, hospital costs, lost wages, and decreased productivity (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2009). Each year, more than 50,000 Canadians have a stroke (Statistics Canada, 2010). That's one every ten minutes. When it comes to stroke managing risk factors is important. We cannot control family history, age, gender, or ethnicity, but luckily we can do something about other factors that could increase the risk of having a stroke.

#### Major risk factors include:

- **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE** - Over time high blood pressure damages blood vessel walls causing scarring that promotes the build-up of fatty plaque which can narrow and block arteries. This can strain or weaken the heart and lead to blood vessels in the brain bursting resulting in a stroke.
- **HIGH CHOLESTEROL/TRIGLYCERIDE LEVELS** - This can cause hard plaque to deposit on the inner walls of your blood vessels, narrowing them and making it difficult for blood to flow through the body. This can lead to blood clots, which block the flow of blood to the brain, resulting in a stroke.
- **DIABETES** - Diabetes increases the risk of high blood pressure, atherosclerosis (narrowing of the blood vessels), coronary artery disease and stroke. If your blood sugar levels are poorly controlled, it can result in circulation problems caused by damage to the blood vessels.
- **ATRIAL FIBRILLATION.** - This is an irregular heart rhythm that can cause blood to pool and get stuck in the grooves of the heart. Clots can form from this pooled blood, and may get pumped up to the brain and result in a stroke.

- **ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION** - Too much alcohol consumption can increase your blood pressure and play a part in the development of heart disease and stroke.
- **SMOKING** - This adds to the build-up of plaque in your arteries (blood vessels), and can increase the risk of blood clots. As well it can reduce the oxygen in your blood, increase your blood pressure and make your heart work harder.
- **STRESS** - People who have high levels of stress or prolonged stress may have high blood pressure. These people are more likely to get atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries) and have high blood cholesterol.

#### References:

Statistics Canada (2010). CANSIM Table 102-0529: Deaths, by cause, Chapter IX: Diseases of the circulatory system. Retrieved May 1, 2011 from [http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2010/statcan/84F0209X/84f0209x2006000-eng.pdf](http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/statcan/84F0209X/84f0209x2006000-eng.pdf)

Public Health Agency of Canada (2009). Tracking Heart Disease and Stroke in Canada. Retrieved May 1, 2011 from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/2009/cvd-avcl-summary-resume-eng.ph>

#### Suggested Workplace Activities:

Display stroke warning sign posters in visible high traffic areas such as lunch rooms and restrooms. Check out the attached link to view/print this poster: [http://www.heartandstroke.com/atf/cf/%7B99452D8B-E7F1-4BD6-A57D-B136CE6C95BF%7D/Stroke\\_WarningSigns\\_Poster\\_outlines.pdf](http://www.heartandstroke.com/atf/cf/%7B99452D8B-E7F1-4BD6-A57D-B136CE6C95BF%7D/Stroke_WarningSigns_Poster_outlines.pdf)

Hold a lunch and learn session on stress management. Contact the Health Unit for seminars on this and other related topics.

Encourage staff to take the Heart and Stroke Foundation's online risk assessment. [http://www.heartandstroke.ca/hs\\_Risk.asp?media=risk](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/hs_Risk.asp?media=risk)

Offer incentives to employees completing the online educational series "Step Up to a Healthier You". Visit [www.stepuptohealthieryou.com](http://www.stepuptohealthieryou.com)

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# Rays for Workers: A Cause for Concern

What serious workplace hazard has been impacting workers since the very first workplace was established, yet receives relatively little attention in healthy and safety discussions? The answer can be found 93 million miles away from us.

The sun, or more specifically the ultraviolet radiation (UVR) our sun emits is slowly gaining recognition as a hazard for outdoor workers. An increase in worker's compensation claims from occupations such as bus drivers, police officers, postal carriers and gardeners, claiming skin cancer caused by chronic sun exposure, has shed some light on this serious workplace concern.

Outdoor workers, such as roads crews, farmers, construction workers, and life guards to name a few, participate in many of the critical occupations that keep our Country and families healthy, safe, and secure. Protecting outdoor workers from the dangers of the sun, cannot be neglected. Employees and employers need to consider UV-protective measures when training new staff or performing health and safety reviews.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in Canada (Cancer Care Statistics, 2009). The primary cause of skin cancer is sun exposure, according to the Canadian Dermatology Association. Outdoor workers have a higher risk of developing this type of cancer because they are exposed to the sun for long periods of time.

With 25% of Canadians aged 16-64 being summer outdoor workers, taking a few simple steps can go a long way to help protect from UVR:

1. **LIMIT EXPOSURE.** Try to schedule work tasks to limit the amount of time you work outdoors in the direct sun from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
2. **SEEK SHELTER.** Shade from buildings, trees, canopies, etc. are good places to seek relief from the sunrays. Make use of them as much as possible, especially during lunch and coffee breaks.

### 3. KEEP YOUR TOP ON.

Wear clothing that covers as much of the body as possible. Fabrics that do not let light through work best. Make sure clothing is loose and comfortable.

### 4. WEAR A HAT.

Wear a wide-brimmed hat (more than 8 cm or 3 inches). Attach a back flap to a construction helmet to cover the back of the neck and a visor for the front of the face.

### 5. USE SUNSCREEN.

Apply an SPF 30 or higher, broad spectrum (protects against UVA and UVB) sunscreen to all exposed areas of skin before you go outside. Reapply at midday or more often if you are perspiring heavily. Spray on sunscreens may be less sticky and may be more suitable for use when there are moving particles in the air, such as dust or grass.

### 6. SLIDE ON THE SHADES.

Sunglasses and safety glasses should be glare resistant, lightweight, comfortable and fit closely to the face. Wrap-around sunglasses offer the best protection.

### 7. PROTECT YOUR LIPS.

Apply lip balm with a broad spectrum SPF 30 or higher protection.

### 8. CHECK YOURSELF.

Check your skin often and look for spots that are new or have changed colour, size or shape. See a doctor as soon as possible if you notice anything unusual.

Outdoor workers are also exposed to UV radiation that reflects off other surfaces, such as concrete, glass, metal, sand, and water. Workers are therefore potentially exposed to a great deal of UV radia-



tion from the sun, even when working in the shade or under overhead protection. Workers should continue to wear sun protection (protective clothing and sunscreen) in the shade for maximum protection.

Employers of outdoor workers should implement sun safety policies, or review existing policies, and educate staff on the importance of UV protection and encourage sun safe behaviours.

While avoiding dangerous ultraviolet rays altogether is impractical and impossible for many professions, taking the aforementioned preventative measures can greatly reduce the risk of skin cancer. Work hard, but work smart, and realize it's unhealthy to do everything under the sun.

*Submitted by Josh Daley, Health Promoter, Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit.*



# VACATION: Rx for Good Health

According to a 2009 Harris/Decima research study for Expedia.ca, nearly 25% of all Canadian workers are failing to take full annual vacations, resulting in an estimated 34 million dollars in unused vacation days every year. Employers may believe they are reaping financial rewards from this unused vacation time but they are paying for it in employee burnout.

"Vacation is an earned employee benefit and has a direct impact on work/life balance and overall productivity," said Bram Lowsky, General Manager at Right Management (2010). "The physical and psychological conditions in which people work can have a real impact on performance. They can affect turnover and retention, absenteeism, health claims, workplace safety and a host of other HR issues."

The Harris/Decima (2009) survey further indicated that although many Canadians understand the health benefits of taking a vacation, financial concerns, time restraints and stress cause considerable barriers to taking one. Many respondents reported that given the current economic climate it was important to put any money available into savings as opposed to spending it on vacationing. Many more reported that they did not have the time to get away. For those that could find the money and time, the stress of preparing for the vacation and racing to catch up at work afterwards made it easy to simply skip it altogether.

Vacation time is essential for employee health and wellness. Taking a vacation reduces stress, heart disease and death. Stress-related mental health claims are one of the leading costs of short- and long-term disability claims. A study from the State University of New York at Oswego

(Gumpp and Matthews, 2000) found that regular vacations lowered risk of death by almost 20 percent in 35-57 year-old men. As well, information collected from the Framingham Heart Study showed that women aged 45-64 who took a vacation once every six years or less were almost eight times more likely to develop coronary heart disease or have a heart attack than those who took at least two vacations a year (Eaker, 1992).

Furthermore, vacationing leads to increased productivity and better employee morale. Employees come back from a break rested and rejuvenated with a renewed sense of drive and determination. A 2006 report released by Alertness Solutions, a research group hired by Air New Zealand confirms this. They reported that after two weeks off, workers got an extra hour of quality sleep each night and had reaction times at work that were 30-40% faster than before they left. These benefits were still felt three months following the vacation.

### Employers can encourage staff to use their vacation time by:

- Setting a positive example. Encourage all Managers/Supervisors to use all of their allotted vacation time.
- Communicating with staff. Encourage Managers/Supervisors to speak with staff about vacation time and help them plan for their absence.
- Updating vacation policies.
- Promoting Work-Life Balance.

#### References

*Alertness Solutions (2006). Science Proves the Value of Vacation. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.airnewzealand.com/press-release-2006-science-proves-the-value-of-holidays-dec06>*

*Brooks B. Gump, PhD, MPH and Karen A. Matthews, PhD (2000). Are Vacations Good for Your Health? The 9-Year Mortality Experience after the Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from [http://courses.umass.edu/econ340/vacations\\_health.pdf](http://courses.umass.edu/econ340/vacations_health.pdf)*

*Elaine Eaker (1992). New York Times, Retrieved May 8, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/business/yourmoney/07shortcuts.html>*

*Harris/Decima (2009). Vacation Deprivation Continues but Canadians Still Value Vacations in Today's Economy, Expedia.ca Survey Finds. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.expedia.ca/daily/enc4105/service/press/releases/2009/0509-vacation-deprivation.asp>*

*Right Management (2010). Workplace Pressures Caused Many Employees to Skip Vacation in 2009. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.right.com/country-sites/ca/en/news-and-events/press-releases/2010-press-releases/item5219.aspx>*

## Vacation Policy CONSIDERATIONS

- **RESEARCH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS:** Vacation time is covered in the Employment Standards Act which can be found on the Ontario Ministry of Labour website. <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca>
- **DETERMINE PRIORITIES:** Are you looking to attract/retain qualified staff, cut down on sick days etc.
- **SEEK EMPLOYEE INPUT:** Develop a couple of options and allow employees to vote for the vacation plan that best suits their needs.
- **CONSIDER YOUR ENFORCEMENT OPTIONS:** Will you adopt a "use it or lose it" policy or will you allow employees to carry over or be paid out for unused vacation time?

# Health at Work NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Health Unit offers a free Health at Work Needs Assessment to area workplaces. This assessment is designed to gather information on the health of the workplace and its employees and to identify any organizational needs the workplace has.

**Participating workplaces will receive:**

- An electronic version of the survey.
- A follow up report outlining the results of the survey.
- A customized wellness plan based on your workplace health needs.
- Assistance in the development of workplace health programs and initiatives.

For more information on the Health at Work Needs Assessment please contact the Workplace Health Promoter at 519 426-6170 or 905 318 6623 ext. 3236.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Giant Colon Tour  
May 25, 2011**

Learn about colorectal cancer and how to prevent it.  
1:00 - 8:00 p.m. at Six Nations Community Hall Ohsweken Fair Grounds  
1738 Fourth Line Rd. (Beside Gaylord Powless Arena)



**A MUST SEE for people aged 50+**

**World No-Tobacco Day  
May 31, 2011**

The World Health Organization (WHO) selects "The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control" as the theme of the next World No Tobacco Day, which will take place on Tuesday, May 31, 2011. For more information visit <http://www.who.int/tobacco/en/>

**Relay for Life**

This event is hosted by the Canadian Cancer Society and will take place in the following communities:

- Caledonia - May 27, 2011
- Port Dover - June 3, 2011
- Jarvis - September 16, 2011

For more information visit [www.cancer.ca/relay](http://www.cancer.ca/relay) or call 1-800-268-8874

**Stroke Awareness Month  
June**

To learn more about Stroke and how to reduce your risk visit [www.stepuptoa-healthieryou.com](http://www.stepuptoa-healthieryou.com)

**World Blood Donor Day  
June 14, 2011**

To participate visit [www.wbdd.org](http://www.wbdd.org). This site includes information, resources events and activity ideas.

Chats Close

Did you hear that the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit is on Facebook??

That's great news! I'll have to check it out!

**[www.facebook.com/hnhealthunit](http://www.facebook.com/hnhealthunit)**



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