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HOW HEALTHY ARE WE - NOT!

by Dr. Brian S. Seaman, DC, FCCSS(C), FICC

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

Makes sense doesn't it! Nowadays we call it "preventative medicine". Unfortunately our health system is not working on the premise - with wait times for advanced diagnostic imaging (MRI or CT) or most surgical procedures, being months - if not years. Preventative medicine - sounds like the way the health care system should be moving - doesn't it?

It is not surprising that our system is not working that way:

- Less than 2% of health funding in Canada is earmarked for disease prevention, and ..
- It takes an estimated 15-20 years to see the potential benefits of preventative medicine as opposed to just a few years for treatment of a disease or condition (Source: Canadian Public Health Association).

"You can pay me now - - or pay me later."

This is our health care system. It makes more sense to increase the focus on preventative medicine as in the long run it will be much more cost effective. Unfortunately it will not benefit our generation but more likely our children and grandchildren but only if we start changing things now.

Recently, a Nova Scotia journalist by the name of Charles Moore summarized our future in a very, from what I felt, was a very concise manner:

"Unless an ethic of disease prevention and wellness promotion can gain popular satisfaction, the health care funding crisis will grind on perpetually, with the potential to bankrupt poor provinces with aging populations".

You guessed it - Nova Scotia is one such province. Apparently one in seven Nova Scotians is older than 65.

Wellness is not a complicated concept or a national secret - -

- Eat a nutritious well-balanced diet.
- Exercise or do a fitness activity on a regular basis (that means at least 3x/week)
- Do not smoke - or if you do - QUIT!

The most common "Killers" -

Many chronic health conditions can lead to - yes - that nasty five letter word - death.

- Heart disease
- Stroke (or CVA)
- High blood pressure
- Lung/ respiratory disorders
- Diabetes (especially Type II)
- Obesity

Some people don't think of being over weight as a disease. However a few pounds can "stress" your wardrobe but a lot of extra pounds can "stress" your bodies organs.

Did you know?

- Every extra pound of fat tissue requires an extra mile of blood vessels.
- Every extra pound of fat around your waist (where we notice it the most) causes 15 lbs strain on your lower back.
- According to the Canadian Community Health survey (October 2002) between 36 to 48% of Nova Scotians are over weight AND
- 21% of Nova Scotians are considered obese - the second highest percentage in

Canada! (in case you're wondering - the National average is just under 15%).

Combine all of this information with the fact that over 55% of Nova Scotians get less than 15 minutes a day of what is considered moderate exercise. You do not have to be a scientist with the Canadian Institute for Health Research to figure out that Nova Scotia is generally a very unhealthy, unfit and unwell society.

How do we change it?

For some, it is too late - the damage on your body is already done. Some of you have taken steps to "turn their lives around". Better late than never BUT we really have to start earlier.

This process should begin with our children and grandchildren! Little things can help. When they visit make their treat cut-up vegetables rather than pop, chips and a chocolate bar. Although the percentage of overweight and obese children tends to be higher in the Atlantic provinces, the rates have **doubled in every province** since 1981. Childhood obesity has tripled between 1981 and 1996! So the next time your children and grandchildren want "junk food" think about these statistics!

We should all encourage our youth to get physically active - and most importantly stay that way! Unfortunately, study performed by Dalhousie University during the 2001-2002 school year, found the percentage of youth who exercise regularly decreases from over 90% in Grade 3 to about 10% - yes only 10% - by Grade eleven.

Exercise and fitness is a health habit. Wouldn't it be great if our legacy to future generations was promotion of health and wellness! That would give us jump start on that thing called "preventive medicine".

The Nova Scotian government established an office of health promotion in 2002. Maybe the government should empower each of us to promote health and wellness - what do you think?

Each of us can do our part. Recent news about our health care system is certainly discouraging - especially for those who are waiting for specialized tests and necessary surgery. Talk to your health care professional about becoming more pro-active about your health, wellness, and level of physical activity. It only takes a few minutes a day but it is a very worth while investment!

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