

HEALTH STATUS REPORT CARD

by Claudette Coombs

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are known for many things our strong cultural heritage, our ingrained work ethic, our intense social network and support systems, and our friendliness. All these characteristics are fundamental for a healthy society and healthy individuals. Unfortunately, we are also well known for a few high risk health behaviours. Nationally, we are a population with the highest smoking rates, the greatest consumption of fat and salt, and consequently the most at risk for heart disease!

We can make many lifestyle choices that allow us to take full advantage of the genetic body which our mind and spirit call "home". We have the opportunity to enhance our quality of life by making sure we do everything under our control to keep our bodies in prime health. Of course, we can't do that without first knowing and understanding a few basic things about health.

CURRENT HEALTH

Physical Health Status

Achieving and maintaining optimal physical health means knowing our current status, our optimal goal, how to reach our health goal, and then working regularly to achieve them. Let's start with our current status.

Yes No

- I get adequate sleep.
- I eat nutritious, balanced meals and snacks.
- I engage in some physical activity daily.
- I maintain a healthy weight.
- I know my blood cholesterol level.
- I know my blood pressure.
- I keep my blood pressure and cholesterol within a healthy range.
- I use alcohol in moderation, or not at all.
- I avoid unnecessary risks when (stretching, lifting, climbing, driving, using power tools, etc.)

Emotional Health Status

Emotional well-being is determined by our ability to cope with our lives "as is", recognize a need to make reasonable changes, and have the ability to begin a process of change. There are many factors necessary for good emotional health; some are internal and directly under our control, others are external but still under our influence.

Yes No

- I have strong skills for coping with stress.
- I have developed relaxation techniques that work for me.
- I work through the negative things in my life.
- I look for, and accept, support from others when it would be helpful.
- I can express my feelings appropriately to others.
- I focus on positive attributes in myself and others.
- I attempt to make changes in my attitude or behaviour when I see it might be helpful.
- There are aspects of my job which I find very satisfying.
- I have a support plan to help when I'm upset.
- I have a close, trusted friend who allows me to vent my emotions safely.
- I have family and/or friends who are "there for me" when I need a boost.
- I recognize my social and emotional needs (for belonging, love, acceptance, etc.) and am able to fulfill them with the resources in my immediate environment.

Spiritual Health Status

Understanding and accepting our role in the universe is an initial step to setting direction for our lives and feeling content with where we are and what we are doing about it. We recognize an ability to realistically improve our relationships, society or humanity by our personal unique contributions.

Yes No

- I take time to keep myself at peace.
- I recognize that there are external forces over which I have no control.
- I acknowledge some power greater than myself (God, nature, the universe, etc.), whether I access that power or not.
- I feel a common bond with others and am able to empathize with their joys and sorrows.
- I believe I can do things to benefit others.

Financial Health Status

Stressors in our lives, such as illness, isolation, criticism, can be harmful to our personal well-being. Financial concerns are equally able to affect our overall health. Being "rich" doesn't necessarily bring better health, but being financially stressed will impact negatively on health status.

Yes No

- I can budget my income to meet necessary expenses.
- I can build in occasional treats (personal purchases, holidays, etc.)
- I am able to plan for future spending.

OPTIMAL HEALTH

In most of these areas we already know what would be optimal for us. For example: an individual's need for sleep can range from five or six hours to nine or ten hours each day. At six hours, if you feel like you're never getting enough sleep, then maybe you're right! A thorough medical examination will provide more information on your personal health goals. Although we can look at "average measures" for blood pressure and other health traits, it is important to know our personal measures. If we fall within normal ranges then we must monitor these health traits and maintain a healthy status as our bodies go through normal life changes and stresses.

ACHIEVING HEALTH GOALS

When our goals have been set we can establish action plans to reach each of them. Some can be achieved much more easily (e.g., finding a good hobby) than others (quitting smoking or losing 35 lbs.). Don't despair all can be achieved with consistent and appropriate effort! Consider one goal. Explore the options (check out information from friends, experts, literature). Decide on a pathway that suits your time, interest, energy and needs. Set levels of achievement and build in personal rewards. Plan to celebrate (public or private) when you reach your goal

Working on more than one goal may be possible if they are related (e.g., increasing fitness and changing eating habits). However, there are some which are much better achieved if done in sequence, such as: learning new methods of coping with stress and techniques for relaxation before beginning the process of quitting smoking!

Your school nurse is an invaluable resource for information on a variety of health topics. You can also contact me for other health information or direction. Whatever your preference in collecting information, your overall emphasis is to plan a realistic strategy to maximize your health, then move forward with it. Re-examine your current status and set your new health goals by seeking some support in all areas.

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