

News Release

St. John's, NL
May 19, 2017

Heart & Stroke, Newfoundland and Labrador, has partnered with the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association (NLDA), Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association (NLMA), Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Hygienists Association (NLDHA), and Canadian Cancer Society Newfoundland and Labrador branch (CCSNL), to launch a sugary drink awareness campaign called the *Count Your Cubes Challenge*.

This month-long challenge aims to educate the public about how much sugar is in commonly consumed beverages with the goal of reducing sugary drink consumption. During the first week of the challenge, participants will record the sugary drinks they consume each day without making any changes to their diet. In the following three weeks, participants will be challenged to make healthier beverage choices each day by consuming fewer sugar “cubes” than they recorded during week one.

There are two ways to participate in the challenge: 1) Participants can create an online account as an individual, team, or family to access a 4-week tracking calendar; or 2) Participants can request a print version of the 4-week calendar to manually track sugary drink consumption. Newfoundland and Labrador has higher than average rates of overweight and obesity. Heart & Stroke sees this challenge as an opportunity to engage individuals and families in a fun challenge, to raise their awareness of what's really in their drink and to potentially influence them to reduce their sugar consumption by choosing healthier options.

May Ann Butt, CEO of Heart & Stroke, Newfoundland and Labrador says, “Children and youth are the highest consumers of sugary drinks, so limiting their consumption is an important step to reversing our alarming youth overweight and obesity trends. *Count Your Cubes* is just one campaign attempting to curb this alarming trend among our youth. Without addressing the issue, this generation will be at greater risk for heart disease and stroke in adulthood. The healthcare system is already negatively impacted by increased costs. If sugary drink consumption trends continue, it is projected to result in over 63,000 deaths and cost the Canadian healthcare system more than \$50 Billion over the next 25 years.”

Sugar consumption is frequently discussed in healthy lifestyle conversations because of its association with adverse health effects. Heart & Stroke is proud to have the following partners join in promoting the *Count Your Cubes Challenge*.

Dr. Rob Cochran of the NLDA says this about sugary drinks, “The consumption of sugary drinks in a high sugar diet is one of the leading causes of tooth decay”. The NLDA have been champion advocates for the *Count Your Cubes Challenge*.

“One of the biggest contributors to sugar in our diets comes from free sugars that have been added to drinks by manufacturers as sweeteners or preservatives. When we drink these free sugars as opposed to eating solid foods, we can consume much larger amounts of sugar more quickly without the effect of feeling full. Too much sugar in our diet can lead to overweight and

obesity, which are major risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and some forms of cancer,” said Dr. Lynn Dwyer, NLMA President-Elect. “Newfoundland and Labrador leads the country as the province with the highest prevalence of these diseases. Our hope is that once participants in the *Count Your Cubes Challenge* realize how much sugar they are actually consuming through drinks they will want to make healthier choices for themselves and their families.”

Matthew Piercey, Executive Director, Canadian Cancer Society - Newfoundland and Labrador division states, “About half of all cancers can be prevented through healthy living and policies that protect the health of the public. We can lower the risk of cancer by not smoking, limiting alcohol consumption, maintaining a healthy body weight and practicing safe sun behaviours. Excess sugar intake is directly linked to excess weight which increases the risk of 11 different cancers”.

Nicole Kielly of the NLDHA expressed, “The NLDHA is excited to partner with the Heart & Stroke to help reduce sugary drink consumption. Dental hygienists in our province work to educate the public that a diet high in sugar increases your risk of developing cavities. We want to empower Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans to embrace their oral health for better overall health and well-being!”

A recent study conducted at the University of Waterloo, estimated that over the next 25 years, sugary drink consumption will be responsible for:

- **More than 1 million Canadians being overweight and more than 3 million becoming obese**
- **Almost 1 million cases of type 2 diabetes**
- **300,000 Canadians with ischemic heart disease**
- **100,000 cases of cancer**
- **Almost 40,000 strokes**

It is time to re-think your drink and take action against sugary drink consumption. The Count Your Cubes Challenge is just the starting point of reduced sugar intake. Visit the website www.countyourcubes.ca for more information or to sign up to participate in the challenge.

All media questions, concerns, or more information can be directed to:

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About the Heart and Stroke Foundation

Life. We don't want you to miss it. That's why Heart & Stroke leads the fight against heart disease and stroke. We must generate the next medical breakthroughs, so Canadians don't miss out on precious moments. Together, we are working to prevent disease, save lives and promote recovery.

