



Community partners team up to launch Niagara Families Healthy Heart Challenge

Heart disease remains one of the leading causes of death for men and women across the Niagara Region¹, yet up to 80 per cent of premature heart disease is preventable. Regular physical activity is one of the key behaviours that can dramatically lower an individual's risk of heart disease.

As part of Heart Health month, the YMCA of Niagara and the Niagara Health System have teamed up to launch the first **Niagara Families Healthy Heart Challenge**. During the month of February, we're challenging Niagara families to make a 30-day commitment to lower their families' risk for heart disease by participating in 30 minutes of physical activity together at least three times per week.

To help inspire Niagara families to get active, the YMCA will be offering free 1-week Try My Y membership passes to Niagara families and Niagara Health System will have a Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist provide advice and tips to the public on risk factors for heart disease. Niagara Region Public Health will also be offering free heart healthy eating seminars at YMCAs across Niagara covering topics such as healthy eating on a budget, quick and easy meals, and lower fat cooking.

A printable tracking calendar with activity ideas, details on registering for healthy eating sessions and free passes to the YMCA to help families get started can be found at ymcaofniagara.org or niagarahealth.on.ca. The YMCA is offering the chance to win a three-month General Family Memberships for those that submit calendars at the end of the month or participate online posting photos of their activities using the hashtag *#healthyheartsNiagara*.

Fast Facts:

- Nine in 10 Canadians have at least one risk factor for heart disease or stroke.
- 1.6 million Canadians live with the effects of heart disease and stroke.
- The leading cause of hospitalization in Canada is heart disease and stroke. There are 350,000 hospitalizations annually due to heart disease and stroke in Canada.
- Each year about 50,000 new cases of heart failure are diagnosed, 70,000 heart attacks occur, and 50,000 strokes send Canadians to emergency rooms across the country.
- Niagara Health System's Cardiac Health and Rehabilitation Program exercise classes are facilitated at four YMCA branches across the region; in Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Welland and Fort Erie. This partnership has benefited thousands of patients over the past seven years.

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¹ Niagara Region - Leading Causes of Death <https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/statistics/injury-death/death.aspx>

Community partners team up to launch Niagara Families Healthy Heart Challenge, continued.

QUOTES:

"We all know that physical activity is the cornerstone of preventative medicine. It can be a lifesaver –literally – when it comes to heart disease and stroke. We encourage individuals of all ages and abilities to incorporate physical activity in their daily lives. The YMCA is excited to collaborate with Niagara Health System and Niagara Region Public Health to raise awareness about heart health and support Niagara families in living healthy lives." Janet St. Amand, CEO, YMCA of Niagara

"A large number of our cardiac rehab patients have risk factors that can be managed through healthy living, including regular exercise. The YMCA has been a great partner for our program, and I would encourage Niagara families to partner with us by taking advantage of the healthy heart challenge as part of Heart Health Month." Steve Walker, Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist, Niagara Health System

"In one way or another, we are all in this together, this aim to increase physical activity in our lives, to improve our eating habits, to improve our mental wellness and mental health and cope better with stress and fatigue. These are the basics we know we all need for the best chance to stay heart healthy." Dr. Andrea Feller, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Niagara Region Public Health

About YMCA of Niagara

As a values-based charity dedicated to healthy living and wellbeing, the YMCA of Niagara has a positive impact on the health of over 90,000 people of all backgrounds, abilities and stages of life from across the region. Operating from 108 program sites throughout Niagara, the YMCA offers health, fitness and aquatics programs, child care, youth outreach, day camp and employment and newcomer services supported by over 900 volunteers annually. The YMCA of Niagara is open to all and is dedicated to providing leadership and opportunities for people and their community to grow in spirit, mind, and body.

About the Niagara Health System

The Niagara Health System (NHS) is a multi-site hospital amalgamation comprised of six sites serving 434,000 residents across the 12 municipalities making up the Regional Municipality of Niagara. The NHS provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient clinics/services at six sites, including Acute Care, Surgical Care, Emergency and Urgent Care, Kidney Care, Complex Care, Mental Health and Addiction, Long-Term Care and Cancer Care. The NHS has 4,256 employees, 650 physicians and 1,100 volunteers, with an annual operating budget of approximately \$468 million.

For further information or to book an interview opportunity, please contact:

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