

SPRING 2017 ISSUE 8

# HealthMatters

mypcn.ca



## RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

EATING YOUR WAY TO GOOD HEALTH

TWO

**CHANGING THE COURSE OF PREDIABETES**

FOUR

SCREENING FOR HEALTH

SIX

**PREGNANCY WEIGHT**

SEVEN

PrimaryCare  
**Networks**  
CALGARY AND AREA

## ► Your *Health Matters*

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) were established in the Calgary area about 10 years ago to give people access to various health services, programs and health teams through their family doctors. Health Matters is published by the PCNs to give you more information about these services.

Today, PCNs work with teams of other health professionals, as well as offer programs such as Prescription to Get Active and Find-a-Doctor.

Over 1,600 family doctors are members of Primary Care Networks in the Calgary area. Within the Calgary zone, seven PCNs provide care to about 1.3 million patients.

### **Health Matters, Spring 2017 Issue publication team:**

Jennifer Allford, Keith Bradford, Terry Bullick, Bart Goemans, Jessica Hone, Cory Leyte, Dr. Christine Luelo, Jacquie Maurice, Janine Poersch, Amy Sawchenko, Chrissie Worth

### **Contributors:**

Jennifer Allford, Mike Ridewood, Jimi Scherer, Neil Zeller

We appreciate your feedback and article suggestions. Contact our editorial team at [communications@mypcn.ca](mailto:communications@mypcn.ca).

### **To find your PCN, visit [mypcn.ca](http://mypcn.ca)**

- › Bow Valley Primary Care Network
- › Calgary West Central Primary Care Network
- › Calgary Foothills Primary Care Network
- › Highland Primary Care Network
- › Mosaic Primary Care Network
- › Calgary Rural Primary Care Network
- › South Calgary Primary Care Network



# Eating your way to good health

## **Getting the right advice about food**

**BY JENNIFER ALLFORD**

Cheryl Aitkens was trying to choose healthy foods and leave less healthy foods on the grocery store shelf. But it was tougher than she expected—what to do about fat-free yogurt that's loaded with sugar? And some advice she read was confusing.

"You read so much and everybody has an opinion," she says. "I want to take better care of myself and I wanted the truth and I wanted someone to point me in an unbiased direction." So, Aitkens signed up for Ask a Dietitian, a group workshop at the Calgary Foothills Primary Care Network, where she could ask questions and learn how to make good choices around food.

"Dietitians focus on teaching practical tips that are easy to incorporate into day-to-day life," says Carmen Prion-Frank, a registered dietitian with Calgary Foothills PCN. "We talk about what to look for on food labels, how to plan healthy meals and modify family favourites to make them flavourful and healthy." Dietitians also help people learn how to get the best value at supermarkets so they can eat within their budgets.

Everyone can benefit from knowing how to shop for and prepare healthy meals.



A change in eating habits can benefit many people, especially if they have a chronic disease



Primary care patient Cheryl Aitkens (left) worked with dietitian Carmen Prion-Frank (right) at an Ask a Dietitian workshop to better understand *Canada's Food Guide* and how to make more healthy food choices.

In fact, family doctors spend a lot of time talking with their patients about food.

"I'd say at least 50 per cent of our patients have some chronic disease or illness that could either be caused by or benefit from a change in eating habits," says Dr. Linda Slocombe, the medical director at Calgary Foothills PCN. "Lifestyle counselling is a big part of family practice; it is something that is talked about a lot."

But often people need more than a conversation with their doctor. "They need a class or course or group support to change their lifestyle habits," says Slocombe.

And that's why doctors refer their patients to programs such as Ask a Dietitian. Whether you have cardiovascular disease and need to cut back on saturated fat or have prediabetes and are reducing sugar, programs can help you learn how to change your eating habits.

"I have a family history of heart disease and diabetes and I have struggled with weight my entire life," says Aitkens, 60. "I have changed the way I buy and the way I cook. I am not perfect—but I am more aware and I pay closer attention."

At work, she packs hummus with her vegetables for lunch rather than a high-fat dip. At home she

cooks from scratch more often and poaches food in chicken broth instead of frying it in butter. And she leaves high-sugar yogurt at the store and brings home plain yogurt to eat with fresh fruit instead.

"I am going to continue to be good to myself," says Aitkens.

"I feel better about my food choices and it makes you feel better when you know you're doing something good for yourself."

**ASK YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR OR HEALTH TEAM MEMBER ABOUT HEALTHY EATING PROGRAMS OFFERED AT YOUR PCN.**



Working with his PCN, Dennis Christensen lost 40 pounds in six months and reversed his prediabetes.

# Changing the course of prediabetes

## Improving your diet can improve your health

PHOTOS BY NEIL ZELLER

When Dennis Christensen was diagnosed with prediabetes just over a year ago, he felt sluggish and tired all the time, and weighed 250 pounds. “It scared the heck out of me,” he says. “I know a lot of people with diabetes and I know what it can do to you.”

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic disease where the pancreas doesn’t produce enough insulin (a hormone that regulates how much sugar is in your blood) or your body can’t use insulin properly. Sugar—glucose—builds up in your blood and can lead to serious complications that can damage the heart, kidneys, eyes, nerves, and shorten your life.

Prediabetes means your blood sugar levels are higher than normal and you’re at a much higher risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Christensen was determined not to

let that happen. “I knew that dieting just doesn’t work,” he says. “I knew I had to change my lifestyle.”

Managing blood sugar levels can delay or prevent Type 2 diabetes. Christensen started seeing a registered dietitian, Karyn Tang, at the Mosaic Primary Care Network in Calgary, for help on changing his day-to-day life—getting more exercise, eating healthy foods and losing weight. He saw Tang every month for a year, started working out and changed what he ate.

“It’s so easy to pull into a drive-through and grab a burger and fries in the middle of the day,” he says. “I totally stayed away from fast foods and started eating healthy.”

Instead of burgers for lunch, he has a salad with a protein and a carb, such as a boiled egg or grilled

chicken breast, along with a whole grain bun.

Tang’s advice included eating three balanced meals a day with low-fat proteins, higher-fibre whole grains and plenty of vegetables. Within six months, Christensen lost 40 pounds. “Within the first 20 to 25 pounds, I was out of that pre-diabetic range,” he says.

Those results are common says registered nurse Lily Ma. “We often see improvements in blood sugar levels within three to six months,” says the primary healthcare team lead at Mosaic PCN. “Healthy eating, physical activity and losing five to 10 per cent of your body weight are all important factors for managing prediabetes.”

As for Christensen, he says “I’m feeling a thousand per cent better.”

# Bonus benefits

## Serving up healthy eating

Healthy eating can help you reach and stay at a healthy weight, which in turn helps you keep a number of other health problems at bay. It also reduces your risk for a number of chronic diseases, including metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Karyn Sunohara, a registered dietitian with the South Calgary Primary Care Network says healthy eating also has a number of bonus benefits. They include:

- When you eat healthy foods, you are more likely to have other healthy behaviours, such as regular physical activity
- Healthy eating can lead to better sleep at night and more energy during the day
- Healthy eating can put you in a better mood, keep you happier, make you less irritable and better able to handle stress
- The nutrients in balanced meals can boost your energy, reducing the need for caffeine or sugar to get a lift. You'll have fewer sugar cravings and crashes
- You may find you're more productive at work and at home, and have fewer sick days. If you do get a cold or flu, you're likely to get better more quickly
- Healthy eating contributes to living a longer and healthier life.



South Calgary PCN registered dietitian Karyn Sunohara.

Healthy eating  
can put you in  
a better mood,  
keep you  
happier



## How you can eat healthier

1. Be open minded about trying new things
2. Make small changes. Switch from cream to milk in your coffee and cut down on sugar
3. Aim to make healthy foods at least 80 per cent of the time
4. Eat fewer processed foods—with saturated and trans fats and high levels of salt and sugar
5. Eat more fibre: vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes
6. Eat three meals a day about six hours apart to better manage your hunger
7. Focus on changing your lifestyle instead of going on a diet
6. Limit juices, sweets and flavoured drinks.

**FOR MORE HELP, VISIT [MYPCN.CA](http://mypcn.ca) TO  
FIND YOUR PRIMARY CARE NETWORK.**





Dr. Michelle Hart (left) and patient care coordinator Justine Yoc of the Calgary West Central PCN. Calgary PCNs are finding patients appreciate reminders for regular screening tests.



# Screening for health

## PCNs are reminding patients when it's time for regular tests to detect diseases earlier

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKE RIDEWOOD

Life is busy and it can be easy to forget when it's time for a regular screening test. That's why Primary Care Networks are tracking your screening tests and giving you a call if you miss one.

Screening for diseases, such as breast or colon cancer, heart disease and diabetes, may detect problems earlier. Earlier detection means you can get started on treatments sooner and can improve your health outcomes.

With healthcare systems moving from old paper records to electronic medical records (EMR), your healthcare provider can keep a confidential, complete collection of your personal health information. Your family doctor can discuss such tests with you during your appointment and EMRs make it

easy to remind you even if you don't come in.

"We have more access to the information about the patients and we use it to improve care," says Dr. Michelle Hart at Vantage Medical of the Calgary West Central PCN. "Now with the click of a button, we can see the tests that are due and a team member can phone and remind patients."

Justine Yoc, a patient care coordinator at Calgary West Central PCN, calls about 100 people a week to remind them of a missed test. "If they don't answer, I leave a message," she says. "People are pretty positive and thankful that you're calling them to update them. Some of them say 'Oh it's so busy, I totally forgot it's been that long. Thanks for the heads-up.'"

Your PCN will remind you of a wide range of screening tests, including mammograms, pap smears and colonoscopies. Other tests include a blood test and body mass index (a calculation based on your weight and height) to screen for diabetes; cholesterol and blood pressure measurements for heart disease; and assessing your bones for osteoporosis. Long-time smokers may be screened for lung cancer.

"Many other countries have been doing this for a while. There is very good evidence that calling patients to remind them of missed tests improves their health outcomes," Hart says, "and patients appreciate the care."

**FOR MORE ON SCREENING TESTS, SEE THE SPRING 2016 ISSUE OF HEALTH MATTERS AT [APPLEMAG.CA](http://APPLEMAG.CA).**

# Pregnancy weight

## Gaining the right amount for you and your baby

### When you're pregnant, you need more nourishment than usual.

The average weight gain during pregnancy is 11.5 to 16 kilograms (25 to 35 pounds), most of it during the second and third trimesters. About a third (35 per cent) of that extra weight is your baby and your placenta and amniotic fluid. The rest of it is from increased blood and fluids and tissue in the breasts and uterus.

### Weight gain according to BMI

How much you need to eat and how much weight you need to gain depends on your pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI), a calculation based on your height and weight.

- **Underweight**—BMI less than 18.5. Gain between 12.5 and 18 kg (28 and 40 lbs.)
- **Normal weight**—BMI 18.5 and 24.9. Gain between 11.5 to 16 kg (25 and 35 lbs.)
- **Overweight**—BMI 25 to 29.9. Gain between 7 and 11 kg (15 and 25 lbs.)
- **Obese**—BMI 30 or more. Gain between 5 and 9 kg (11 and 20 lbs.)

Source: AHS Healthy Pregnancy Weight Gain

About half of Canadian women gain too much weight during pregnancy, which can make them uncomfortable, make labour more complicated and make it harder to lose weight after having their baby.



Extra weight during pregnancy can also increase the risk of developing high blood sugar leading to gestational diabetes. It can also increase the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease later in life. Too much weight gain can also cause your baby to be overweight or obese in childhood.

Not gaining enough weight during pregnancy also has risks. Babies of underweight mothers are more likely to be born preterm or with low birthweight (less than 2.5 kg or 5 lbs. 8 oz.). This can put them at greater risk of disease in the first few weeks of life and physical and developmental disabilities and health problems later in life.

### When and how much more to eat:

- **First trimester**—no extra calories
- **Second trimester**—you need about 350 more calories a day
- **Third trimester**—you need about 450 more calories a day
- **While breastfeeding**—350 to 400 more calories a day
- **When pregnant**, eating every two to four hours gives your baby a steady supply of nutrients and may help you feel better if you're nauseated.



# Primary Objective

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NEIL ZELLER

**Name and Age:** Walter Watson, 51

**Health condition:** I was overweight, 338 pounds, and I had uncontrolled diabetes. My blood sugar was through the roof and one of my knees hurt.

**Health goal:** I wanted to lose weight and get my blood sugar levels down.

**How I feel now:** I've lost 60 pounds. I'm eating better and going to the gym three times a week to ride the bike for 40 minutes and do weight training. I'm feeling a lot better, more active. And with the help of the medication, my blood sugar is down by almost half.

**Working together:** *Walter has been a pleasure to work with. As part of our Heart Health Program, he enrolled in a medically supervised exercise program to safely and effectively increase his activity levels. We created goals and assessed barriers around physical activity. I met with him one-on-one to help him start training with weights, which helped him manage his knee pain. He's making great progress towards improved fitness for weight and diabetes management.*

— Joni Olitch | kinesiologist,  
Mosaic Primary Care Network