

# Turn over a new leaf for your health

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Welcome to a new year where we have a chance to turn over a new leaf and take a fresh look at our health. Not sure where to start?

Maybe we can help with some concrete facts from our *Health Disparities Report 2013*.

This report looked at health outcomes, access to care, health related behaviours and health spending in Bermuda; and compared people by age, gender, race, marital status, household income, and education.

If you see yourself reflected in the findings, maybe you'll give yourself a much-deserved pat on the back... or find inspiration for change!



■ MCT PHOTO

## Chronic

To start, the report showed that nearly 1 in 3 adults have been diagnosed with hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol, or another chronic health condition such as coronary heart disease, asthma, depression, diabetes, stroke, kidney disease, etc.

Think about it: one third of the island's adults have at least one chronic health condition.

Persons of higher income were least likely to have high blood pressure (10 per cent) compared to 39 per cent of persons in the lowest income bracket; and blacks and other races (minorities) were more likely to have been diagnosed with high blood pressure (37 per cent and 38 per cent respectively) compared to whites (25 per cent).

High blood pressure should be of concern for everyone as it can lead to damage to your arteries, heart and brain.

It might seem normal if most people around you have it; but it isn't normal or healthy.

Talk to your doctor to get

**TIME TO QUIT:** Twenty per cent of men smoke in Bermuda compared to only 9 per cent of women. Smoking has risk factors that include high blood pressure and other chronic diseases.

on the right track.

High cholesterol also affects those in the low-income bracket (51 per cent) more than those in the highest income (21 per cent).

In terms of chronic conditions persons with a higher level of education (ie university degree or higher) were less likely to have been diagnosed with a chronic health condition.

To add to this, the new year concerns must include

the "elephant in the room": obesity.

Overall 68 per cent of Bermuda's adults are overweight or obese and those aged between 40 and 64 are the most likely to be overweight compared with younger adults (18-39) and seniors.

The good news is that all of these things can be changed. Unlike fixing the economy, it is possible to reverse these trends with

some small (and some not-so-small) individual changes.

The report found five areas where Bermuda can achieve improvements:

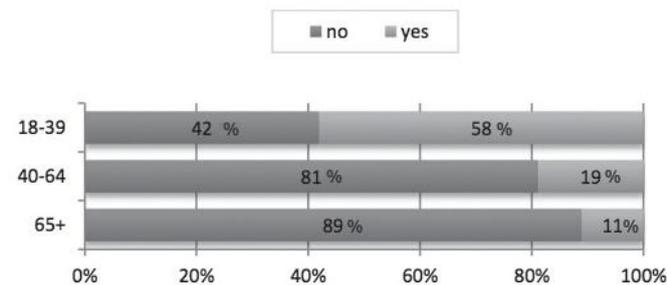
**1 Smoking:** 14 per cent of us smoke and it's time to put down the cigarettes. One segment of the population may need to work on this a little more than others: men.

According to the Report, 20 per cent of men smoke some days or every day, compared to 9 per cent of women. Smoking is one of the risk factors in high blood pressure, angina and other chronic diseases.

**2 Alcohol:** At 35 per cent, younger adults aged 18 to 39 were over three times more likely to binge-drink than seniors (4 per cent) and almost double the rate of 40 to 64 year-olds (19 per cent).

Those in the highest income bracket and education level were most likely to report binge drinking —

Graph 1: Condom use by singles (last sexual intercourse) by age



■ GRAPH SUPPLIED

**THE GRAPH** above shows condom use by singles.

## New Year's Resolution: Drink more water!

This is the time of year when we get back on track to healthier eating and exercise.

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## HEALTH

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39 per cent and 26 per cent respectively.

**3 Fruits and vegetables:** Eat more of them! Nearly one in three adults in Bermuda reported having less than one serving of fruits per day.

The recommendation is five a day. Nearly one in ten reported having less than one serving of vegetables per day.

Adults aged under 40 are nearly three times more likely than seniors to have less than one serving of fruits per day; and over three times more likely than seniors to have less than one serving of vegetables per day.

**4 Exercise:** Get some! Seniors and the middle-aged are more likely to engage in moderate activities than adults aged under 40.

However, they are less likely to engage in vigorous activities, and 7 per cent of under-40 adults exercise vigorously five or more times a week.

**5 Safe sex:** Should be the only option. Only half of single adults in Bermuda said they had used a condom the last time they had sex. (See Graph 1, opposite.)

Use of condoms reduces the risk of sexually transmitted disease (STD) and HIV transmission.

This result is a strong indicator of sexual risk tak-

## Bermuda Health Council

Established in January 2006, the Bermuda Health Council (BHeC) is tasked with regulating, coordinating and enhancing the provision of health services in Bermuda. Led by a board representing a broad range of sectors in Bermuda's community, and staffed by a team of committed professionals, the Bermuda Health Council works with health system stakeholders towards a quality, equitable and sustainable health system for the Island.

ing, which was more prevalent among older adults.

While younger adults were more likely to have multiple sex partners, they were also more likely to use condoms.

Older individuals had fewer sexual partners, but they were less likely to use a condom. This is a concerning statistic as worldwide the number of STDs in older adults has grown.

So there you have it: the SAFES recommendations. If we each tackle our own behaviours regarding Smoking, Alcohol, Fruits and veg, Exercise and Safe sex, we'll be well on our way to a brand new you for years to come. ■

**FOR MORE information and results from the Health Disparities Report 2013, visit our website: <http://www.bhec.bm/reports-studies/>.**



■ ISTOCK PHOTO

**EAT THE RAINBOW:** Eat more produce to stay healthy.