



MEDIA RELEASE

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No time, too lazy or too sick to get healthy, say overweight and obese Australians

- **Results of the third annual Zurich Heart Foundation Heart Health Index**
- **Australians continue to be in denial about meeting heart health guidelines**

Overweight and obese Australians have admitted they are too lazy, don't have the time, or are hampered by an existing condition or illness when it comes to making significant changes in their lifestyle to become healthy. This is despite being aware of their personal heart health risks, according to the 2010 **Zurich Heart Foundation Heart Health Index**, a joint initiative of Zurich Financial Services Australia (Zurich) and the National Heart Foundation of Australia, released today (Tuesday 19th October).

Many are in denial. One in eight (13 per cent) overweight Australians believe they are healthy and do not need to change.

Lack of time is the most common barrier to changing behaviour, named by 27 per cent of people, mostly women and people under 40. But there were a range of other reasons given as well.

- Eight per cent admitted to being too lazy or not motivated to make the necessary changes.
- One in eleven (9 per cent) reported an existing condition or illness that prevents them from changing their behaviour.
- Three per cent reported the weather as a barrier.

People with children, who were most likely to report lack of time as a barrier, were significantly less likely to adhere to recommended health guidelines. They are less active (61 per cent do not meet recommended activity levels versus 51 per cent), are more likely to smoke (19 per cent versus 13 per cent), and less likely to have their blood pressure (81 per cent versus 91 per cent) or cholesterol (52 per cent versus 75 per cent) checked as frequently as people without children.

Australians' self-reported heart health risk behaviour continues to reflect denial about meeting health guidelines. Close to half (46 per cent) of overweight Australians and 13 per cent of obese people thought their health met guidelines. Close to three in four rate their health as either 'good' or 'very good'. Only four per cent rated their health as 'poor'. Three-quarters of obese people rated their health as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Other Key Findings

- Close to 60 per cent of Australians are not getting the recommended amount of physical activity per week. However, 47 per cent thought they were meeting the guidelines.¹
- Three-quarters of Australians wrongly believe that their vegetable consumption meets health guidelines. More than half that only consume one or two serves of vegetables per day believe their consumption meets the guidelines.²
- One in six smokers believe that they have a 'low' or 'very low' risk of heart disease.
- The majority of Australians focused only on lifestyle factors, such as diet, physical activity (or lack of), weight and smoking, but very few mentioned clinical risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes.

Dr Lyn Roberts, National CEO of the Heart Foundation said that the results showed many Australians were not making their own health a priority.

"With an Australian dying every 22 minutes from heart disease, we need to find ways to help Australians to prioritise their own health," she said.

Mr Colin Morgan, General Manager – Life Risk Australia at Zurich, said, "The Index clearly shows at risk Australians are ignoring simple guidelines to improve their health. Heart disease remains the biggest killer of men and women in Australia, which is reflected in the number of claims of our customers. As one of the largest global insurance companies, Zurich continues to see the impact of underinsurance on families when they're in crisis.

"The impact of ill health on families is multiplied when they're not adequately insured. Not only do they need to cope with the illness or death of a loved one, they're also hit by the crippling financial burden of related health costs that results. We hope all Australians take this issue seriously, for you and your family. Take the time to follow the recommended guidelines to avoid being an unnecessary victim of heart disease," Mr Morgan said.

Further highlights are summarised overleaf. The full report can be found at the websites of Zurich www.zurich.com.au/hearthealthindex and the Heart Foundation http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/About_Us/Media_Centre

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¹ Based on a guideline of five sessions of thirty minutes of physical activity a week.

² Based on a guideline of five servings of vegetables a day

Some highlights of perceptions and demographics of Australians and their heart health risks

Physical Activity

- About one in two (47 per cent) Australians who do fewer than five sessions of physical activity each week believed they meet health guidelines. This is up on the previous two surveys (35 per cent in 2009 and 43 per cent in 2008).
- Surprisingly, one in six respondents that were meeting or exceeding five sessions of physical activity each week felt they had not done enough to satisfy the guidelines.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

- Close to half (46 per cent) who are overweight thought their weight met health guidelines.
- Thirteen per cent who are obese thought that their weight met health guidelines.

Vegetable Consumption

- Three-quarters of Australians wrongly believe that their vegetable consumption meets guidelines.
- More than half (53 per cent) of those who have just one to two serves believe they meet the guidelines.
- More than two-thirds (70 per cent) of those who had three to four serves believe they meet guidelines.

Fruit Consumption

- Of those who do not meet the fruit consumption guidelines, one third thought they were meeting the recommendations.
- Men are significantly more likely to feel they are meeting recommended guidelines.
- Nearly 90 per cent that don't eat sufficient vegetables also do not eat sufficient fruit.

Smoking

- Nearly one third of smokers rated their health as 'very good' or 'excellent'
- One in six smokers believe they have a 'low' to 'very low' risk of heart disease.

Blood Pressure

- Women (88 per cent) were significantly more likely to have their blood pressure checked in the last 12 months than males (83 per cent).
- Blood pressure checks increase with age. Two thirds aged 20-29 had a blood pressure check in the last 12 months, compared to 96 per cent aged 60 and over.
- Smokers (79 per cent) were significantly less likely to get a blood pressure check.
- Obese people (92 per cent) were more likely to get a blood pressure check compared to other weight categories (underweight 80 per cent), ideal weight (84 per cent) and overweight (84 per cent).

Blood Cholesterol

- As with blood pressure checks, cholesterol checks increase with age.
- Smokers were significantly less likely to have a blood cholesterol check than non-smokers (67 per cent).
- Those that rated their health 'very good' or 'excellent' were significantly less likely to have had a blood cholesterol check in the last 12 months than those who rated their health 'fair' or 'poor'.