

nutrition and physical activity for seniors

A Summary of the Results
of the B.C. Nutrition Survey*

* For the full reports on the B.C.
Nutrition Survey, go to
[www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/
prevent/bcnutritionsurvey.html](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/prevent/bcnutritionsurvey.html)

Introduction

In 1999, 1,823 adults from all over B.C. participated in the B.C. Nutrition Survey. They were asked about their eating and physical activity. They also had their heights and weights measured and the supplements they took recorded.

The information collected will help planners come up with ways to make healthy eating and active living the easy choices for seniors in their communities, workplaces and homes.

As seniors live longer, are healthier and are more active than in past,

British Columbia benefits from their participation in the political, economic and social life of their communities.

More Physical Activity

A healthy weight is key to healthy aging. About half of seniors reported doing mild exercise six times a week, while just over 16 per cent participated in moderate activity and two per cent were involved in strenuous exercise. Seniors who exercise moderately at least an hour each day have better heart health and are better able to control their weight.

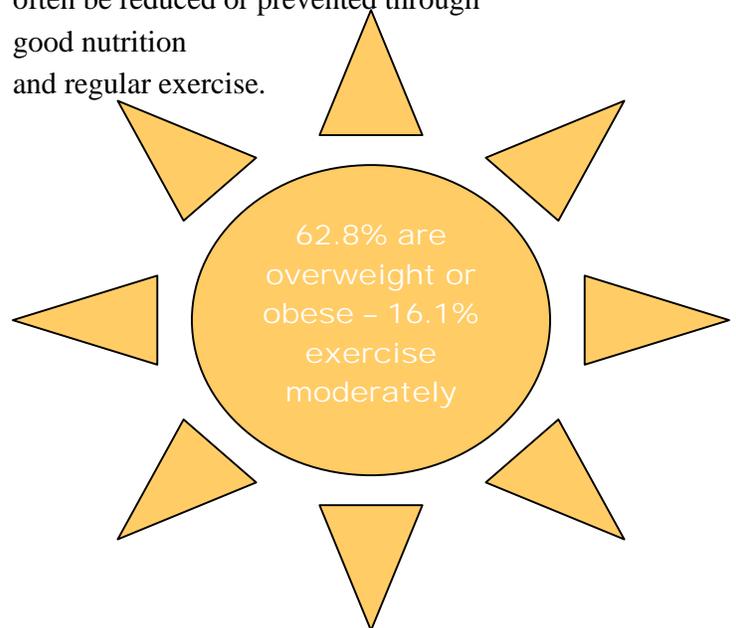
Managing Chronic Disease

Many seniors are living with chronic disease.

- ▶ 18.9% of seniors who responded had heart disease and 19.5% cancer
- ▶ 25.8% had high cholesterol
- ▶ 37.9% had high blood pressure

A diet poor in essential nutrients and physical activity can also place seniors at risk of bone disorders, such as osteoporosis, impaired thinking and bowel problems.

The risk of acquiring a chronic illness can often be reduced or prevented through good nutrition and regular exercise.



Reducing Salt Consumption

High levels of salt consumption can also contribute to illness. With almost 38 per cent of B.C. seniors reporting high blood pressure, this is a serious public health concern. The survey shows about 62 per cent of older men and 25 per cent of older women could reduce their salt intake.

Increased potassium, calcium and magnesium consumption can also help in managing blood pressure rates.

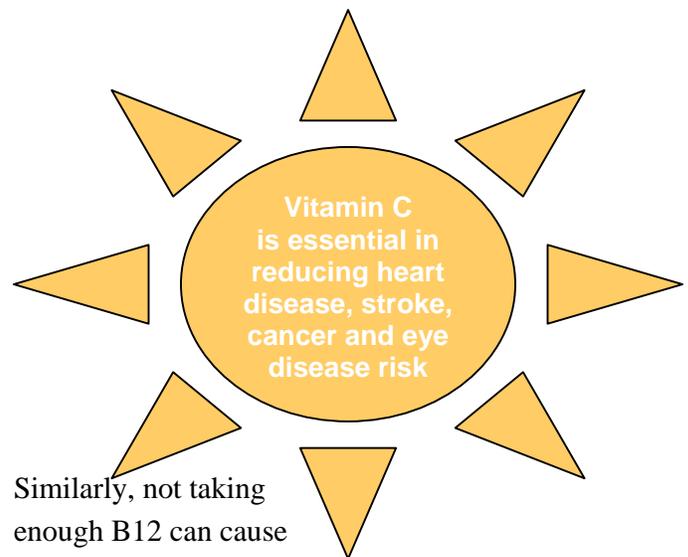
The Important Role of Vitamins and Minerals

A diet low in essential vitamins and minerals can leave seniors vulnerable to disease and impairments to their thinking.

Almost half of B.C. seniors who completed the survey did not obtain enough folate and 16 per cent had low levels of vitamin B6. A deficiency of either can be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Among steps seniors can take to prevent or reduce chronic disease are:

- increasing their consumption of vitamins and minerals through food or supplements (folate, vitamins B6, B12 and C, magnesium and zinc);
- eating orange and green vegetables more often;
- choosing lower fat milk and meat products;
- eating more whole grains;
- choosing legumes and seeds as protein sources.



Similarly, not taking enough B12 can cause anemia, blood-cell disorders and neurological disorders such as memory loss and changes in gait. About 10 per cent of B.C. seniors did not receive enough B12 and one-quarter were below recommended levels of vitamin C. B.C. seniors' diets can also be low in fibre, which helps maintain coronary and bowel health, and calcium, which is needed to maintain healthy bones.

Diet + Exercise = Better Health

As people age, a balanced diet and physical activity are sometimes harder to achieve – a senior's energy level may decline, while their nutrient requirements remain the same. Since a diet high in fat or low in a variety of food choices, combined with obesity or low levels of physical activity, increases the risk of serious disease, it's important that seniors continue to eat well and exercise as they age. Doing so has an added benefit – it helps seniors remain active in their home and community life.