

# The Heart Truth

Heart health is a concern for every woman

By Heather Andrews Miller

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada hopes to raise awareness among Canadian women of the fact that heart disease and stroke is their leading cause of death.

The Heart Truth, a new national public health campaign, was launched by the non-profit organization in February.

Only one in three Canadian women says they are aware that heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death. Even more disturbing is the statistic that only one in eight women recognizes it as their most serious health concern.

When a campaign similar to The Heart Truth was launched in the United States, awareness leaped by 23 per cent.

Heart disease and stroke were once thought to be a men's disease, but statistics from 2003 show that in Canada the number of deaths from these causes is almost equal, totalling 36,823 women versus 37,004 men. While many of the risk factors, signs and symptoms are the same for both genders, there are certain factors specific to women, such as the role of estrogen, birth control pills, pregnancy and menopause.

Sandra Thornton is a survivor who became active with the Heart and Stroke



An advocate for smart heart living, Sandra Thornton keeps active with granddaughter Skye in the kindergym.

Foundation as a result of her mother's bout with heart disease in her 40s. Being forewarned, she was doing everything she could to avoid a repeat in her own health history.

"I've always been very physically active, maintained a healthy weight, and I've never smoked. I took the stairs instead of the elevator and ordered salad instead of French fries," says the St. Albert woman.

But in December of 2004, at a time when she was exhausted as a result of pressures at work and extensive business travelling, Thornton faced a cardiovascular crisis.

"I noticed discomfort in my chest and was awakened with chest pains in the middle of the night," remembers the then-51-year-old. "The pain moved into my back and arm, but I thought it was indigestion. However, involvement with the Heart and Stroke Foundation had taught me the signs, so I awakened my husband who immediately drove me to the hospital."

The emergency staff took her symptoms seriously, and fast-tracked the otherwise healthy-looking woman to the front of the line, beginning to test her immediately. "I have a lot of praise for Capital Health and the Sturgeon Hospital for their care."

Over the next few hours she had an EKG, and blood tests, among others, and by later in the morning medical professionals had confirmed that she had indeed suffered a heart incident that required further

exploration.

"I was transferred to the University Hospital where additional tests showed a 90 percent blockage on the left anterior artery," she states. "My cardiologist told me later that blockage could have resulted in a massive heart attack if I had not acted quickly."

The next day an angioplasty, which widens the artery where the blockage is, along with a stent to keep it open, was performed.

The operation was successful but her recovery was not an easy one. "I started cardiac rehab but wasn't progressing, having problems with heart rate and other considerations, and a few months later, another blockage in the same place had re-occurred.

The angioplasty was repeated, with the introduction of a different type of stent that would help prevent clots or build-up from forming again. "I didn't get back to work until July. But I'm happy to say that I've returned to living

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*Sandra Thornton in a kayak – she urges other women to live a healthy lifestyle and to be aware of the risks.*

## heart truth

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a very full life.”

Thornton urges other women to live a healthy lifestyle and to be aware of the risks.

“I want to emphasize that there are a lot of things we can control,” she says. “We can maintain a healthy weight and cholesterol levels, and lead an active life.

“Being as my mother was in her 40s when her heart problems started, my doctor said I’d done well by postponing my condition until I was in my 50s, and I did it by living a healthy lifestyle. If I hadn’t taken these precautions, making me healthy and strong, it likely would have killed me.”

One happy result of her experience was that she curtailed her workaholic tendencies.

“I did go back to the same job, but I no longer bring work home with me and I don’t work 12-hour days anymore,”

she says. She has increased her intake of healthy foods even more than before as well.

As part of The Heart Truth campaign, the risks associated with heart disease will be profiled, including eye-opening figures such as the fact that over 45 percent of women have cholesterol levels that are too high.

And after menopause, as natural estrogen levels drop, cholesterol levels often increase even more, with the result that an alarming 80 percent have unhealthy levels.

Another risk factor is diabetes. Young women who are pregnant have hormones present that interfere with the body’s ability to use insulin efficiently, causing blood sugar levels to rise and gestational diabetes to occur.

Although it usually disappears after the birth, diabetes can reappear later, and the condition is a risk factor in heart disease and stroke. Pregnancy and childbirth increase the risk of stroke by as much as three to 13 times.

Thornton has been involved with the Heart and Stroke Foundation for many years, serving on the board and as president from 2000 to 2002, inspired by her mother’s long-term heart disease.

Her passion of keeping women aware of the risks led Thornton to start a website, [www.smart-heart-living.com](http://www.smart-heart-living.com), which contains information and resources for healthy living. She urges women to educate themselves and become involved.

“Start yoga or other relaxation methods to combat stress and stay fit by eating healthy and being active. Look after your body. Heart disease and stroke can happen to you and you need to live a heart-healthy life to ensure you are here for a long time to come.”

## Cleopatra’s Closet offers unique gowns

Cleopatra’s Closet specializes in one-of-a-kind pieces.

New designer fashions are sold at 50 to 70% off retail prices while very gently loved items are available at incredibly low prices. To ensure the One-Of-A-Kind status, owner Dawn-Marie Meyer buys designer items from the States and all over the world.

Many customers keep Cleopatra’s Closet a well-guarded secret, for fear of others getting to the ‘good stuff’ before they’ve had a chance to treasure hunt for themselves.

Cleopatra’s Closet is more than just fashionable clothing and accessories. Knowing that customers may wear a gown only once, Dawn-Marie encourages them to re-consign their purchases back to her. “I am the Purge and Replenish Queen,” she declares, “I’ll even come to their house if they need help cleaning out their closet.”

Dawn-Marie also offers shopping therapy and advice to her customers. She is driven by the premise that everyone should be able to afford Prada on a Le Chateau budget.

She has an uncanny ability to work with different people to find clothing suitable for their needs, for example, new university/college grads who need fashionable wardrobes at a low budget, new mothers who need fashion forward clothing in numerous sizes to accommodate their ever changing size after birth, or hip grandmas who are not ready to give up their funky style just yet.

“I’m passionate about what I do and try to accommodate everyone’s requests when it comes to special items they need or want for future events,” says Dawn-Marie.

Customers who register their emails with the store receive e-vites to special events in the store after hours, as well as special week-end deals of up to 25% off the last price.

The future looks very bright indeed for Cleopatra’s Closet, with the addition of children’s designer fashions, a lounge for dads and kids to hang out and a website to peruse and buy any time of the day ([www.cleopatrasconsign.com](http://www.cleopatrasconsign.com)).

*Information supplied by Cleopatra’s Closet.*



## on the cover

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Not one to seek her own glamour, she does not mention the achievements she has accomplished in the past. Yet, her award citation clearly spells out some of her major successes, including national recognition for designing a commode built by the University of Alberta Bio-med department.

Outside of work, Mather has volun-

teered in many capacities, including as an Olympic Weightlifting official and at the Commonwealth games, overseeing medical supplies.

Mather’s personal life is a picture of success as well. With her husband Larry, she has brought up four successful children who have been a great influence in her life. Larry, an Olympic weightlifting coach, shares Mather’s passion for sports. The couple has four grandchildren.

### Advocate for the environment

For the sake of future generations,

Mather has taken a strong stand as an environmentalist. Her concern for the environment has led her to adhere strictly to certain principles such as buying locally from the farmers’ market, minimizing travel, and not using pesticides or sprays. By this summer, she says, she will have made her home completely energy efficient.

It seems that Mather has extended her care not only beyond her territory, but even beyond her generation.