



‘Head in the sand’ attitude may put hearts at risk – new research

New research reveals that ageing Australians consider themselves thinner, fitter and healthier than they actually are, placing many in the firing line for life-threatening heart attack and stroke.¹

The nationwide poll of more than 1,000 Australians aged 45 years and older found that despite almost 80 per cent of respondents reporting at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease, a disconnect exists between perception and reality of three major risk factors for heart attack and stroke.¹

Among Australians aged 45 years and older:

Cardiovascular Risk Factor	Perception (Galaxy Research, December 2016)	Reality (Australian Bureau of Statistics)	Gap (extrapolated from Galaxy and ABS survey findings)
Overweight or Obese	37% say they are overweight or obese ¹	72% (2014-15) ²	35%
Sedentary Behaviour	49% say they do not exercise regularly ¹	71% (2014-15) ²	22%
High Cholesterol	23% say they have high cholesterol ¹	41% (2011-12) ³	18%

“When it comes to cardiovascular risk, too many Australians have their head in the sand. This mindset needs to be seen as a major risk factor for heart disease,” said Elizabeth Allen, President of Heart Support Australia, a national support group for Australians impacted by heart disease.

In 2015, one Australian died from cardiovascular disease every 12 minutes.⁴ Despite this, the poll by Galaxy Research found that relatively few Australians considered themselves at high risk of suffering a stroke (16%) or heart attack (15%).¹

At least 85 per cent of respondents acknowledged that a heart attack or stroke would have a major impact on their life,¹ yet only 13 per cent had modified their lifestyle to avoid cardiovascular health problems.¹ A third said they would only be jolted into action if a doctor told them cardiovascular disease could be an issue.¹

“The first step to combatting heart disease is to tackle the ‘it’ll be right’ attitude and get Australians to acknowledge that they need to do more to reduce risk,” said Ms Allen.

The poll found that the greatest fear associated with cardiovascular disease was ‘having a stroke and surviving with a disability’ (44 per cent) – twice the rate of fear of ‘death’ from cardiovascular disease.¹

“Australians should be concerned about cardiovascular disease – it impacts too many lives. We all have a role to play in helping raise community understanding of cardiovascular

disease and the positive steps that can be taken to reduce risk,” said Dr Gary Jankelowitz, Medical Director for MSD in Australia.

To reduce cardiovascular risk, Australians should see a health care professional with the aim to:⁵

- Quit or reduce levels of smoking
- Monitor and improve cholesterol levels
- Monitor and control high blood pressure
- Get active and exercise regularly
- Follow a heart-healthy diet
- Get to a healthy weight and maintain it
- Control diabetes.

The poll of a representative sample (1,006) of respondents aged 45 years and over was undertaken by Galaxy Research in December 2016 on behalf of MSD in Australia.

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[Heart Support Australia](#) is a national organisation committed to minimising the psychosocial and physical impacts of heart conditions on Australian families.

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