

Issues & Answers
AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE NEWS AND THE NEWSMAKERS

Heart of the matter

Easy-to-digest book offers juicy tidbits to scare you to life

BY FRED SIMPSON
STAFF WRITER

In one section of his book, *Take It To Heart*, Thornhill cardiologist Dr. Rob Myers cheerfully offers his opinion on fast-food outlets: "Avoid them unless it's to use the restroom."

That's for openers, he's just warming up. For example:

- "Bacon and sausages are cesspools of unhealthy ingredients. They are teeming with a vertiginous collection of fat and salt...and should only be consumed by people who are terminally ill."
- "Alfredo sauces are a white, creamy death."
- "Smooth, creamy butter goes well with many things, including caskets and tombstones."

His definition of a hotdog is equally daunting: "Ground fat and cholesterol masquerading as a wiener."

He lightens up a bit when speaking of garlic. "If your primary goals are to spice up your food and spice down your love life, then use garlic with reckless abandon. If you think it will reduce your cholesterol, recent evidence suggests you are wasting your money."

As you might have gathered, cholesterol and other forms of fat are the formidable villains in Myers' book. His definition of a hotdog is equally daunting: "Ground fat and cholesterol masquerading as a wiener."

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It's not meant to scare you to death, just wise you up to what the future may hold a few thousand juicy steaks down the road. You will have been introduced along the way to the irreverent wit and wisdom of Sunnybrook Health Science Centre cardiologist Myers.

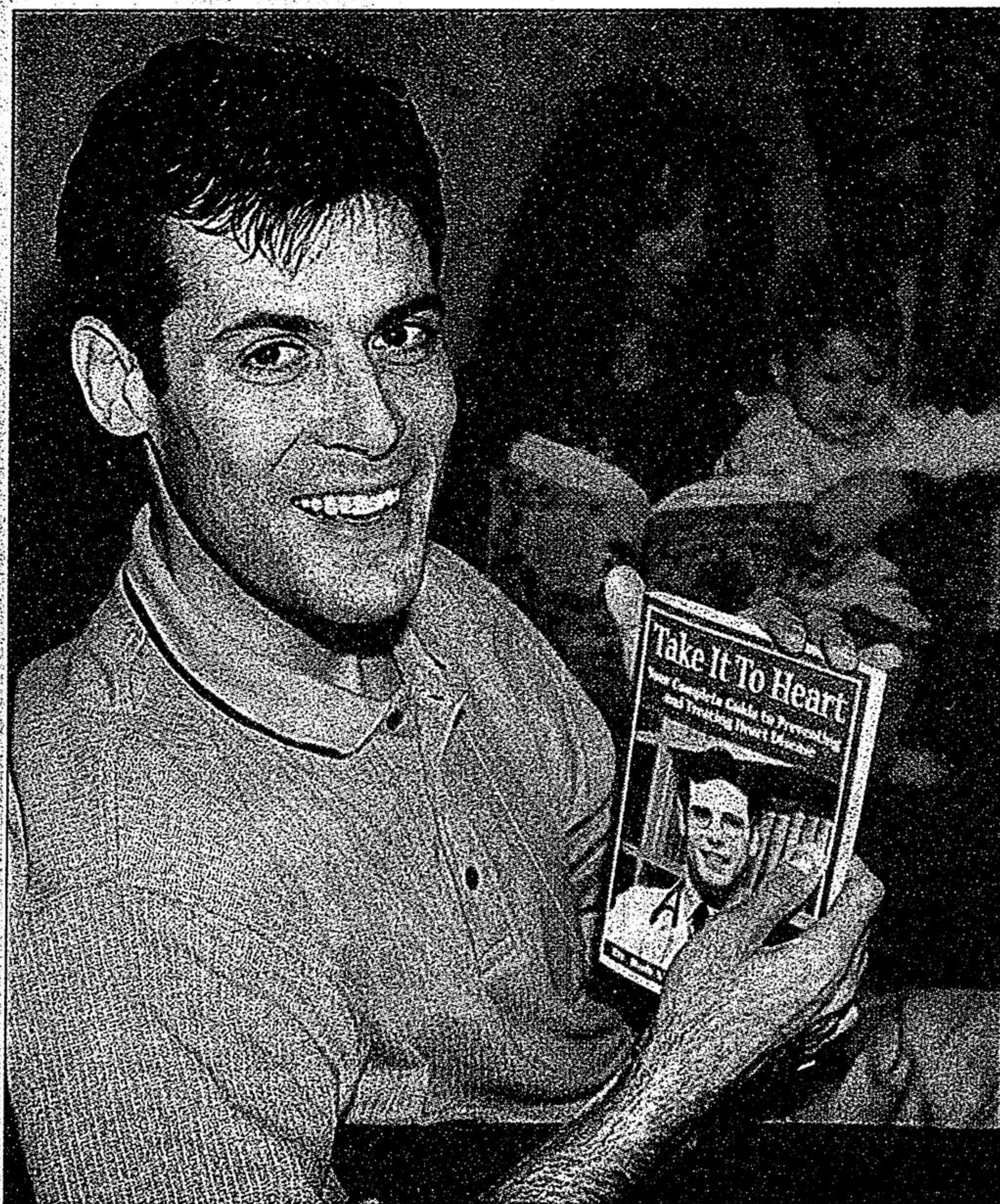
The 34-year-old Thornhill resident has put together a 170-page, oft-humorous and always easy-to-digest offering that deals with cardiac risk factors and how to modify them to prevent a heart attack.

"I decided to write this book out of the frustration of seeing all the people who pass through my office who already have the disease," Myers said.

He'd like to get to them before they get to him.

"Once a heart attack occurs, the dead heart muscle will remain dead. It can no more recover function than a hand can regrow a finger after it's cut off."

He was also inspired to write the book because of the "many others on the market



Dr. Rob Myers promotes a heart-healthy lifestyle in his book *Take it to Heart*. Behind Myers is his wife, Randi, and daughter, Rachel.

which I found were way too long and too technical", Myers explained.

The book, with editing help from Myers' wife, Randi, was two years in the making and was published last October.

It received an initial boost when Shoppers Drug Mart, as part of its Health Watch program, stocked the book in its stores.

The Myers have two children, Seth, 2, and Rachel, seven months.

"Most of my spare time is taken up with the two young kids at home," said Myers, who graduated from the University of Manitoba Medical School in 1988.

"I also play poker every two weeks, but I'm not sure that's something you want to write," he joked.

Myers did his internal medicine in cardiology training at the University of Toronto and spent a year in acute care cardiology at Boston Medical Centre.

"There's so many people out there who just don't realize that some heart attacks can carry a worse prognosis than cancer."

A heart attack, he pointed out, kills or cripples more people than cancer. Its deadly toll includes many victims who delay getting medical attention.

"One reason so many people die of heart

attacks prior to reaching the hospital is denial," Myers said. "Their last words are often, 'It's only a little indigestion.'"

Patients arriving at the hospital soon after the onset of an attack have the best chance of recovery, he said.

"I've treated many people whose hearts stopped within five minutes of their arrival in the emergency department."

At the same time, Myers harbours no fantasies of converting the world to a life of soy-bean and treadmills.

"That doesn't even sound attractive to me. My goal is to inspire you to address your risk factors and improve your health."

He realizes that no one's perfect about health, and that includes himself.

"I follow my own dictates to the reader but not to the extreme. At the same time, however, I make sure I always know the amount of fat that I'm eating," he said.

"On occasion I'll have a high-fat dessert, or a steak, but it's not a common practice of mine."

Steady now.

All is not gloom and clogged arteries, after all.

Myers goes on to vouch for a moveable feast of such low-saturated fat foods as pasta, whole grain foods, safflower, sunflower, corn, canola and olive oils, pistachios, avocados and fish of all types.

As if to accent the positive even more, Myers announced he and his wife would be indulging in a healthy meal of pasta fagio for dinner.

"It will include pasta, beans, onions — it's very tasty and it has very little fat to it. It tastes good."

And don't forget to exercise and check your stress count once in awhile.

In his book, Myers touches every base as he graphically details the workings of the circulatory system as it applies to the heart.

The reader learns the risk factors for heart disease, how to lower cholesterol, which foods contain fat, which vitamins will really help your heart, which exercises are best for you, how to control your blood pressure and how to quit smoking.

Throughout, his message to the reader is a simple one: "If you choose to continue to smoke a pack a day or gorge on fat-laden, vegetable-bereft meals, that is your choice."

"Once you have the facts, the decision to continue practising high-risk behaviour becomes an educated one and I believe in informed choices."

Dr. Rob Myers' book, *Take It To Heart*, is published by ECW Press of Toronto and retails at \$19.95.

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