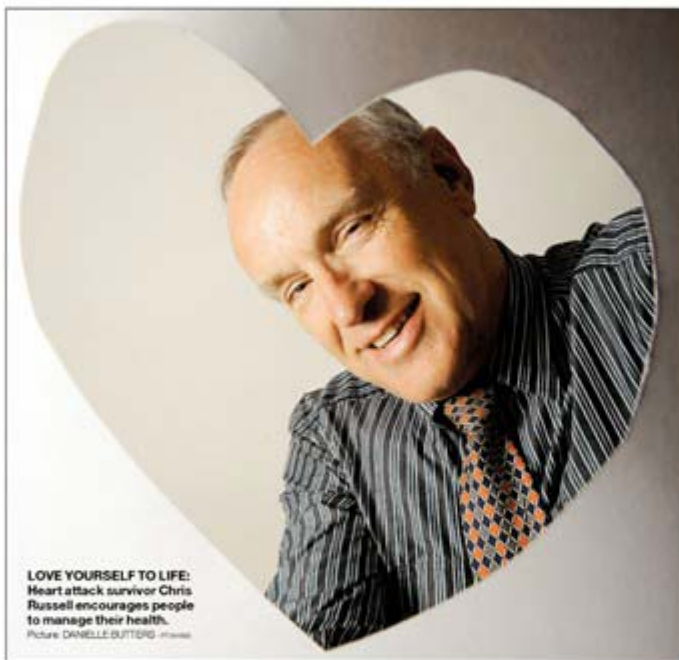


'It's about treating every day as a gift. That's why they call it the present'

Be your own heart-throb



LOVE YOURSELF TO LIFE:
Heart attack survivor Chris Russell encourages people to manage their health.

Picture: DANIELLE BUTTIGG

JULIE HUFFER

IF you played rugby in your teens, hit the tennis court in your 20s and took the odd ski trip in your 30s, you must be immortal, right?

Heart attack survivor Chris Russell thought he was, until he was shocked into action at 52. The deputy chairman of Barker College and judge on the ABC TV's *Nine Invenors* wound up on an operating table at Royal North Shore Hospital after a day out on a boat turned nasty.

He was plunged into icy water on the Hawkesbury River - and his heart didn't like the experience.

"I had a diseased section of artery and it sort of cracked in the fight or flight response," North Turramurra resident Russell said. He didn't feel pain, just woozy with pins and needles in his arm.

Russell's cardiologist, Professor Geoffrey Toffler, explained the fall into cold water may have caused a surge in blood pressure that ruptured plaque lining the artery, resulting in a blood clot blocking the injury site.

After emergency catheterisation and implantation of a stent, Russell was placed on medication and given a comprehensive rehabilitation program, including exercise and meditation.

Six years later, he still attends a weekly exercise class at the hospital, walks an hour a

HEARTBREAKING

- More than 48,000 Australians a year die from cardiovascular disease.
- Heart disease accounts for 34 per cent of deaths in Australia annually.
- Coronary heart disease (heart attack, angina, blocked arteries) claims more lives than any other cause.
- Lifestyle changes could prevent most deaths attributed to cardiovascular disease. See heartresearch.com.au/healthy-heart-in-four-easy-steps.

day and monitors his weight and cholesterol.

"I can't afford to take any more risks," he said in the lead up to North Shore Heart Research Foundation's Heart Week, beginning May 2.

As an ambassador for the foundation, Russell encourages busy, hardworking people to take time out to evaluate their health.

He was running an agricultural consulting business and campaigning against high-rise development in Kuring-gai when his health faltered. "You need to manage the mechanics, but it's not about dropping your bundle and becoming a recluse," Russell said.

"It's about maintaining quality of life and treating every day as a gift. That's why they call it the present."

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