



## **Heart Disease**

### **What is heart disease?**

Heart disease is a term that covers a variety of conditions that affect the performance of the heart. The most common problem is ischaemic heart disease, also known as coronary heart disease.

Heart disease kills more people than any other disease. Your heart is vital for life. The way you lead your life - what you eat, how you exercise, how you spend your leisure time - can help prevent coronary heart disease and premature death.

### **Ischaemic heart disease**

Ischemic heart disease is caused by a poor supply of blood to the heart. The poor blood supply is caused by narrowing, or complete blocking of the arteries supplying the heart with blood, (the coronary arteries). This narrowing or blockage is usually caused by fatty deposits in the coronary arteries. These fatty deposits can also be caused atheroma or plaques. Ischemic heart disease can cause angina, heart attack or abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia). Angina causes chest pain due to a narrowing of the coronary arteries restricting the flow of blood to the heart muscle. A heart attack is caused by a complete blockage to one of the coronary arteries. The chest pain is usually more severe than with angina and the heart can become permanently damaged.

### **Healthy eating**

Eating well can help prevent heart disease. Change your diet to a low fat (particularly saturated fats), low salt diet that includes fruit and vegetables. Avoid frying food; grilling is a much healthier option. You should eat a minimum of 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Try to reduce the amount of red meat you eat substituting it for fish or chicken. You should aim to eat 2 portions of fish a week. Also try reducing your number of convenience foods; these tend to contain more fat, sugar and salt.

### **Physical activity**

Taking regular moderate physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your heart. 30 minutes of exercise at least 5 times a week that increases your pulse rate will reduce your risk of heart disease more than people who do no activity at all. Exercise also improves your sleep.

Active people can also eat a little more without having to worry so much about their weight since they burn more calories and have a higher resting metabolic rate.

Moderate intensity physical activity makes you feel warm and slightly out of breath but you can still talk. It helps your heart to become stronger, so that it can pump more blood around your body with less effort.

### **Physical activity and your lifestyle**

People of all ages can benefit from physical activity. But you must always start gently and gradually build up an exercise programme. If you already have a medical condition and are anxious about what type of exercise is suitable for you, speak to your doctor. It is important to incorporate exercise into your daily routine so it doesn't become a chore.

There are a wide range of options, including brisk walking, cycling, dancing, swimming or going to the gym. Alternatively the activity does not have to be a sport, gardening, taking the stairs instead of taking the lift when shopping or choosing to walk instead of driving or taking the bus will all help.

### **Alcohol Intake**

Moderate consumption of alcohol (between 1 and 2 units of alcohol a day) may help to reduce the risk of ischemic heart disease in men over the age of 40 and women after the menopause. However high levels of alcohol consumption increase your risk of premature death. Alcohol contains a lot of calories and can cause obesity. We know that people who drink heavily are more likely to die of heart disease than those who do not. So, if you drink, do so in moderation.

The recommended weekly consumption of alcohol for a man is 21 units, and for a women 14 units. Binge drinking can be harmful. Having alcohol free days is beneficial. A sensible daily limit of alcohol for men is no more than 3 to 4 units of alcohol per day, and for women, no more than 2 to 3 units per day.

The list below shows the number of units of alcohol in various drinks:

- a pint of ordinary strength lager = 2 units
- a pint of bitter = 2 units
- a pint of ordinary strength cider = 2 units
- a 175ml glass of red or white wine = around 2 units
- a pub measure of spirits = 1 unit
- an alcopop = around 1.5 units

### **Smoking Cessation**

Giving up smoking not only reduces your risk of developing heart disease, but also reduces the risk of many other serious illnesses, like cancer and the serious lung disease, emphysema. It is never too late to stop, and your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will always offer you advice and support to help you achieve this.

### **High blood pressure (Hypertension)**

High blood pressure increases your chances of developing heart disease. There are usually no symptoms of high blood pressure, so you may not be aware you have it. If you are over 40 years of age, you should have your blood pressure checked. Your doctor or nurse will advise how frequently you should have this done. It will depend on your risk of developing high blood pressure or heart disease.

### **Further information**

The British Heart Foundation  
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[www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)