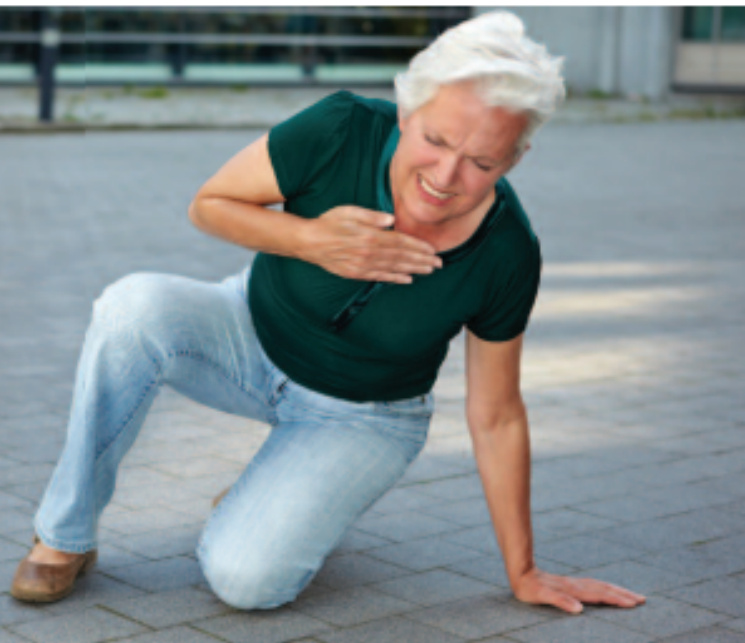


Know your numbers

Cardiovascular health & lifestyle

Cardiovascular disease is one of the biggest killers in the UK and many of these deaths could be prevented by simple lifestyle changes.

Cardiovascular disease is a collective term used to describe diseases of the heart and blood vessels – the two most common forms are Coronary Artery Disease (heart disease) and Stroke.



One in five women and one in four men will die from heart disease. However, by taking a serious look at your lifestyle there is a great deal you can do to lower your risks of developing cardiovascular disease.

Understanding your risk

Read through the following questions - how many 'Yes' answers do you have? It is important to understand that the more risk factors you have, the higher your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Do you smoke?

If yes, did you know that a smoker doubles their risk of dying from cardiovascular diseases compared to a non-smoker? If they also suffer from high blood pressure and high cholesterol then there is an eight-fold increase in risk. By stopping smoking the risk of heart disease is rapidly reduced.

Are you overweight?

If yes, consider reducing your weight. Excess body weight places a greater strain on the whole body, especially the heart and joints. It can also affect blood pressure, blood cholesterol levels and encourage the onset of diabetes in adults.

Do you eat foods high in fat?

If yes, the amount and type of fat in the diet is what most affects your blood cholesterol. Keep saturated fats to a minimum, replacing them with vegetable oils (e.g. olive or sunflower oil) and use margarine that does not contain (or contains very little) trans fatty acids or hydrogenated fats.

Are you inactive?

(i.e. you accumulate less than 30-minutes of physical activity each day)

If yes, include more activity into your daily routine. Regular physical activity is crucial to maintaining a healthy circulatory system and helps you to lose weight, lower your blood pressure and improve your blood cholesterol levels. Remember, if you have any health problems or have not exercised for a while, have a check-up with your doctor first.

Do you feel anxious, tense or under pressure a lot of the time?

If yes, learn to de-stress. When stressed the hormone adrenaline is released into the blood, speeding up the heart rate and increasing blood pressure. So being stressed consistently for extended periods of time may place more strain on your heart. Plan your day, set yourself realistic deadlines for work and learn to delegate. Put time aside each day to relax and take time off – a change of routine can help to recharge the batteries.

Know your numbers

Cardiovascular health & lifestyle contd

Is there a history of heart disease in your family?

If **yes**, it does put you at a higher risk especially if your mother or sister developed cardiovascular disease before 65, or your father or brother before 55. This does not mean that you will develop cardiovascular disease, only that the risk of this happening is higher than the average. If this is the case you should really focus on the lifestyle factors you can control – it will make a difference to your risk.

Do you know your blood pressure?

If **no**, it is a good idea to get it checked especially if there is a family history of high blood pressure.

If **yes**, and you have high blood pressure it does put you at higher risk. This does not mean that you will develop cardiovascular disease, only that the risk of this happening is higher than the average. Speak to your doctor about how you can minimise the risk. It can often be controlled by maintaining a sensible body weight, taking regular exercise, limiting alcohol intake, avoiding smoking, learning to relax and moderating salt intake.

Is your blood cholesterol level high?

If **yes**, it is worth noting that high cholesterol is strongly associated with cardiovascular disease. It can be frequently reduced by appropriate weight control and specific dietary measures.

Do you have diabetes?

If **yes**, and it is not properly controlled, diabetes can lead to a range of diseases including cardiovascular disease. If you are diabetic you should attend a diabetic clinic regularly to keep control of your blood sugar levels. It is also important to know your blood pressure and cholesterol measurements. By watching your weight, taking care of your diet and increasing your exercise levels you can help reduce the risk of developing adult onset diabetes.

