



The UK has one of the highest rates of heart disease in the world. A heart attack is responsible for approximately 1 in 4 deaths in men and 1 in 6 deaths in women.

There are several major risk factors associated with heart disease - high blood pressure, high cholesterol, poor diet, smoking, obesity, lack of exercise, high alcohol intake, high levels of stress, and genetic predisposition. What is interesting to note is that all of these factors, with the exception of the last one, can be influenced by making simple dietary and lifestyle changes.

Tips for reducing chances of heart disease

- ✓ **Maintain a healthy weight**
- ✓ **Follow a healthy balanced diet**
- ✓ **Eliminate salt from your diet**
- ✓ **Avoid alcohol, caffeine and smoking**
- ✓ **Take a good amount of exercise and use stress reduction techniques**

Make sure that your diet is heart healthy

There are three key foods to avoid if you want to keep your risk of heart disease to a minimum - saturated fat, sugar and salt. Having excess sugar in the diet increases weight, too much saturated fat increases weight and increases blood fats, and eating too much salt raises blood pressure. Salt intake should be kept to 6g a day and to achieve this you need to pay attention to food labels. The salt value can be present in two ways - as salt or as sodium. To convert sodium values into salt values simply multiply the given sodium value by 2.5.

You can easily cut back on saturated fat by swapping red meat for white meat or fish. Substitute battered, bread crumbed or deep fried food with grilled, baked or steamed meat or fish, and eat boiled or baked potatoes instead of chips. Swap snacks like some crisps and chocolate bars (which can contain lots of saturated fats and sugar), for fresh fruit or a handful of nuts or seeds, or raw vegetables and low fat hummus.

A good way to protect yourself from heart disease is to make sure you get your '5 a Day' fruits and vegetables.

This is important because fruits and vegetables contain soluble fibre and antioxidants. Soluble fibre helps to lower cholesterol and antioxidants help to protect blood fats from becoming damaged and sticky.



Protect yourself with antioxidants

Antioxidant nutrients are quite possibly the most important nutrients with respect to heart disease. This group of naturally protective vitamins and plant chemicals help to protect the cardiovascular system in numerous ways. Vitamin C and bioflavonoids found in highly colourful fruits, vegetables and berries help to maintain the strength of artery and capillary walls. Vitamin E enters the heart health equation by being a powerfully protective nutrient to protect against 'bad' fats travelling in the blood.

- ✓ **Steam all your green leafy vegetables rather than boiling them since this helps to reduce vitamin C lost during cooking**
- ✓ **Drink a glass of freshly squeezed citrus fruit 3-4 times a week to help top up on vitamin C**
- ✓ **Cook with olive oil which is a mono-unsaturated fatty acid and rich in vitamin E; make sure you keep the heat low so as not to burn the oil**



Eat "good" fats

Just like good and bad cholesterol there are good and bad fats. We have already mentioned that you need to avoid "bad" or saturated fats. The good fats can be found in oily fish (eg salmon, sardines, mackerel), nuts and seeds and are often called omega-6 and omega-3. Fish oils or flax seed oils from the omega-3 family can actively reduce LDL cholesterol, reduce triglycerides and thin the blood. These foods are fantastic healing foods for the cardiovascular system.

Watch your waistline

Excess weight is stored as body fat, and it makes sense that if you are storing a high percentage of fat, then you will ultimately be transporting more fat in your blood. This is why blood tests indicate that levels of cholesterol and triglycerides often increase to potentially dangerous levels when you are overweight or obese. The knock on effect of this is that a large amount of this transported blood fat gets deposited onto blood vessel walls causing atherosclerosis, narrowing the vessel walls and creating raised blood pressure. It's not just the blood that is under stress, the actual weight of this excess body fat puts an incredible strain on the heart which has to beat much harder to propel blood around the body. Eventually the cumulative effect of ongoing strain on the heart and blood vessels results in angina and heart disease. A waist measurement of more than 80cm for women and 94cm for men can indicate increased cardiovascular risk and you should seek advice from your GP.

Get fit and fight fat

One way to burn off excess weight, tone the cardiovascular system and reduce your risk of heart disease is to follow a regular exercise routine. You don't need to go running a marathon to lower your risk. All you need to do is commit to regular exercise of moderate intensity such as brisk walking, dancing, cycling or swimming. Adults should aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on five or more days of the week, only 37% of men and 25% of women in the UK are active at this level. Good ways to achieve this are to make small changes to your daily routine like taking a brisk walk on your lunch break.

What kinds of physical activity should be part of my routine? A comprehensive physical activity routine includes three kinds of activities:

- **Aerobic Exercise**
- **Strength Training**
- **Flexibility Exercises**

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise increases your heart rate, works your muscles, and raises your breathing rate. For most people, it's best to aim for a total of about 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. If you haven't been very active recently, you can start out with 5 or 10 minutes a day and work up to more time each week. Or split up your activity for the day -- try a brisk 10-minute walk after each meal. If you're trying to lose weight, you may want to exercise more than 30 minutes a day. Here are some examples of aerobic exercise:

- **Take a brisk walk (outside or inside on a treadmill)**
- **Go dancing**
- **Take a low-impact aerobics class**
- **Swim or do water aerobic exercises**
- **Try ice-skating or roller-skating**
- **Play tennis**
- **Stationary bicycle indoors**

Strength Training

Strength training, done several times a week, helps build strong bones and muscles and makes everyday chores like carrying groceries easier for you. With more muscle, you burn more calories, even at rest. Here are some ways to do it:

- **Join a class to do strength training with weights, elastic bands, or plastic tubes**
- **Lift light weights at home**

Flexibility Exercises

Flexibility exercises, also called stretching, help keep your joints flexible and reduce your chances of injury during other activities. Gentle stretching for 5 to 10 minutes helps your body warm up and get ready for aerobic activities such as walking or swimming. Your health care team can provide information on how to stretch.

Being active throughout the day

In addition to formal exercise, there are many opportunities to be active throughout the day. Being active helps burn calories. The more you move around, the more energy you'll have. These strategies can help you increase your activity level:

- **Walk instead of driving whenever possible**
- **Take the stairs instead of the lift**
- **Work in the garden, rake leaves, or do some housework every day**
- **Park at the far end of the car park and walk to the shops**

Before embarking on any new exercise or diet please consult your doctor. The information on this sheet is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. Any person suffering from conditions requiring medical attention, or who has symptoms that concern them, should consult a qualified health practitioner.