

Keeping your heart healthy



What is ischaemic heart disease?

The heart is a muscle and requires oxygen and nutrients via its own blood supply to function properly. There are many conditions that affect the heart. The blood vessels that supply the heart can become damaged by a gradual build up of fatty material in their walls. This stops the blood being delivered to the heart muscle as effectively and can cause symptoms like angina. This process is called atherosclerosis. Damage to the blood vessel walls can occur because of factors that you have inherited from relatives or because of risk factors detailed below.



☺ Keeping you heart healthy

To help keep your heart healthy, we (the doctors and nurses at the practice) ask questions about your lifestyle and take measurements from your body to help us decided what advice we should be offering you.

These are known as risk factors and include:

- Being a smoker
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Not keeping active and fit
- Being overweight
- Having a raised blood pressure
- Having a raised cholesterol
- Having diabetes
- A close relative with heart disease

The fewer risk factors you have, the better chance your heart has of remaining healthy.

There are lots of things you can do to help keep your heart healthy. There are also many medical treatments that are recommended to help too.



☺ Exercise

Exercise improves your overall health and can make you feel good.

To gain benefit you should aim to do 30 minutes five times a week. Exercise does not need to be like Paula Radcliffe running the marathon! To gain benefit you need to get warm, mildly out of breath and feel your heart rate increase.

Why not walk or cycle to work/shops?



☺ Healthy Diet

We know that a balanced healthy diet helps prevent or reduce the severity of heart disease.

- Try to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and veg a day.
- Eat plenty of fibre.
- Don't eat more than you need.
- Try not to add too much salt to your food.
Processed food can contain large quantities of salt and sugar.

Cholesterol is a chemical that is made in your liver from the fatty food that you eat; you do need some cholesterol to keep healthy. Too much can cause atherosclerosis, increasing the risk of heart disease. There are many dietary changes you can make to reduce your cholesterol naturally.



Alcohol

Alcohol in moderation can be pleasurable and beneficial. However if you drink above the recommended limits you will be damaging your body.

Stay safe and stick within the limits;

- ☺ Women less than 14 units per week.
- ☺ Men less than 21 units per week.

Did you know one unit is only a small glass of wine or half a pint of normal strength lager/beer?



☺ Be a non smoker

Smoking kills, and puts you at increased risk of many unpleasant diseases, including heart disease. We appreciate it can be hard to give up. For that reason all our nurses are trained to give you advice and support on how you can give up NOW!

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

High blood pressure means that the pressure in your arteries is too high. Reducing your blood pressure helps protect your arteries and reduces the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a common condition in which the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body is unable to use it properly. People who have diabetes are at greater risk of developing heart disease.



Drugs

Many patients with heart disease or at risk of heart disease are advised to take medication to help modify their risk factors.

- There are many drugs that help reduce your blood pressure to below or near the recommended level of 150/90.
- Statin drugs can help reduce your cholesterol.
- Aspirin can help reduce the 'stickiness' of the blood and stop it clotting in the already narrowed blood vessels.
- Diabetic patients often require medication to control their disease.

Your GP or hospital consultant will recommend which drugs will help you.

It is important that you take your medication as it has been recommended to you. We aim to get the right combination for you as an individual. If you have concerns about a particular tablet you are taking, come and talk about it. Don't just stop taking it.

To help you keep your heart healthy we suggest regular checks at the surgery. The nurse will let you know how often these need to be and with whom.

The information contained in this pamphlet is brief and not intended to tell you everything there is to know about your body and keeping your heart healthy.

There are lots of really useful leaflets and booklets already written to help you further. Try www.patient.co.uk

Our nurses and GPs also have a wealth of information between them- you just need to ask.

Our nurse will be able to print off information leaflets on any of the issues raised in this pamphlet.

The British Heart Foundation has an excellent website which has many very helpful leaflets.

www.bhf.org.uk

Or contact their Heart Information Line on 08450 708070

Our nursing team can give you support and advice on how to stop smoking, lose weight or make healthy changes to your lifestyle to protect your heart.



Thank you for taking the time to read this pamphlet. It won a national award for its use of plain English, we hope you find it clear and helpful.

Dr Nicola Gill March 2010