

Heart disease

Heart disease is the single most common cause of death in the UK. It is also the single most common cause of death for people aged under 65 years old. There are currently approximately 2.6 million people living with heart disease in this country.

What is Heart Disease?

Coronary heart disease (CHD) occurs when your arteries become blocked and restrict the blood and oxygen supply to your heart. This process can result in angina (a heaviness or tightness in the chest) or a heart attack.

Common indicators of heart disease are breathlessness, chest pain and fluid retention. The main causes are as follows:

- obesity
- smoking
- high cholesterol
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- family history of heart disease
- lack of activity or exercise
- heavy drinking of alcohol
- stress

Your risk of heart disease is higher if you are black or Asian. Women also have a higher risk after the menopause, when oestrogen levels in the body drop. For more information on this, see our section on [Menopause](#).

Ways to help prevent heart disease

There are many steps that you can take to reduce your chances of developing heart disease:

Stop smoking – Stopping smoking is the single most important thing you can do to live longer. If you smoke, your chances of developing heart disease are at least double that of a non-smoker. The good news is that the risk decreases as soon as you stop smoking. One year after giving up, your risk of a heart attack is halved.

Eat a healthy diet – Lower your cholesterol level by eating lots of fruit and vegetables, and by cutting down on salt, meat, poultry, fish, seafood and dairy products. Only drink alcohol in moderation.

Exercise – Regular exercise will strengthen your heart muscle and will also lower your blood pressure.

Keep calm – There is a link between stress and metabolic syndrome, a condition that increases the risk of developing heart disease.

Get your blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked by your GP – People with high blood pressure and high levels of cholesterol in the blood run a higher risk of having a stroke or a heart attack. Have your levels checked, so that you know whether you need to change your lifestyle to reduce the risk.

Heart disease and heart attacks

Heart disease is the leading cause of heart attacks. With Coronary Heart Disease, the coronary arteries (the major blood vessels that supply blood to the heart) get clogged up with deposits of cholesterol. These deposits are called plaques.

Before a heart attack, one of the plaques bursts, causing a blood clot to develop which may then block the supply of blood running through the coronary artery, triggering a heart attack.

See our article on [Heart attacks](#) for more information.

Local Help and Support

All GPs should now keep registers of people with coronary heart disease, so that they can identify who would benefit from having regular reviews.

[The Patient Information Centre](#) offers a range of health related information including;

- medical conditions
 - procedures and treatments
 - details about self help and support groups
 - information about complaints procedures
 - copies of leaflets
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For information and guidance on **improving your home to meet your needs better** please visit the [Housing section](#) of Information Now website.

Other Useful Information

- The [British Heart Foundation website](#) has more information on all of the above.
- [Heart Research UK](#)
- [HEART UK](#)
- [NHS.UK](#)
- [Healthtalkonline](#)

Please note – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact [NHS 111](#). In an emergency, dial 999.

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Useful Organisations

Patient Information Centre – Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)

Website: www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: St Nicholas Hospital, NE3 3XT

British Heart Foundation

Email: heretohelp@bhf.org.uk

Website: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0300 330 3322

Address: Compton House, B37 7YE

Heart UK

Email: ask@heartuk.org.uk

Website: <http://heartuk.org.uk/>

Telephone: 01628 777 046

Address: 7 North Road, SL6 1PE

Heart Research UK

Email: info@heartresearch.org.uk

Website: <http://heartresearch.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0113 234 7474

Address: Suite 12D, LS3 1AB

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0113 234 7474

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