



# You Are The Key to a Healthy Heart





# You've Just Taken One Step Closer to a Healthier Heart!

Your heart beats for you, and only you. By choosing to open this booklet you're already thinking about how to better care for your heart.

You'll find everything you need here to start making healthier choices today. By taking charge of your own heart health, you're not only improving your life but also inspiring the people you care about most. Your commitment can encourage others to take positive steps towards their own heart health. Together, these small actions can create a powerful ripple effect, bringing us closer to a future where heart disease is a thing of the past, and you are part of making that happen.

**We believe in YOU!**

# Heart Research UK

We're helping hearts today, delivering lifesaving activity right now in your community whilst funding vital research to find a cure.



## Millions

**Invested in research**

We've funded pioneering studies to prevent, treat and cure heart diseases, driving breakthroughs that save lives.



## 10,000

**Patients supported**

We've helped thousands of congenital heart disease patients live safer, more active lives through our Physical Activity Toolkits.



**2,000**

### Heart surgeons trained

Since 2012, we've trained 2,000 clinicians in advanced cardiac care — improving patient outcomes and saving more lives.



**70,000+**

### Lives changed

Through our community projects helping those most at risk eat better, move more, and live heart healthy.

**Heart diseases claim a life every 5 minutes in the UK**

We urgently need your support, until there are no more deaths from heart diseases.

**Donate now**



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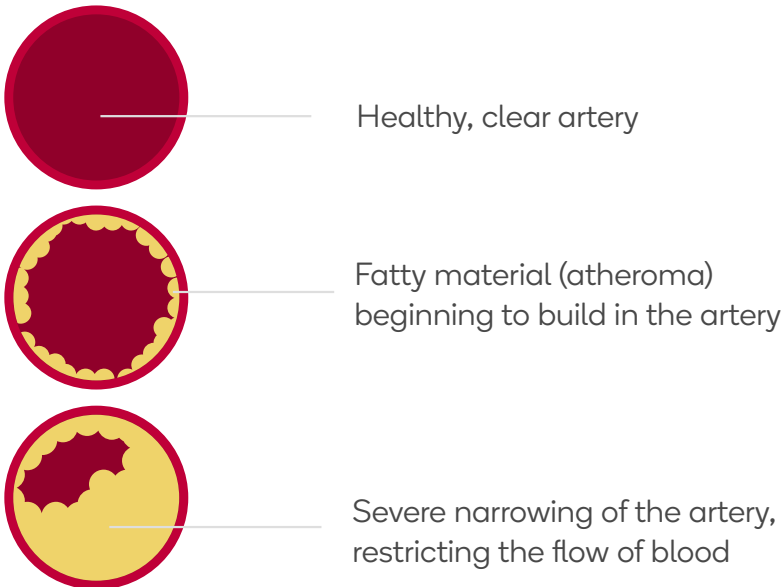
# What is Coronary Heart Disease?

Coronary heart disease is a cardiovascular disease that affects the blood supply to the heart.

The coronary arteries that supply the heart with oxygen become narrow or blocked due to the build-up and hardening of fatty materials on the inside – a process known as atherosclerosis. This takes place gradually over many years and affects the flow of blood to the heart muscle.

Restricted flow to the heart is often felt as chest pain, particularly during exercise. This is called ‘angina’ which is a symptom of coronary heart disease. Angina can be a warning sign of a future heart attack.

A heart attack happens when one of the coronary arteries is completely and suddenly blocked and part of the heart muscle becomes starved of oxygen.



## Signs of a Heart Attack

It's important to know the signs.

If you or someone you know experiences the following symptoms:

- Tightening, squeezing or pain in the centre of the chest
- Lightheaded, dizzy, sweating
- Feeling of unexplained anxiety
- Shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing
- Feeling sick, heartburn
- Pain in the shoulder blades or travelling from your chest down your arms

Women often experience atypical symptoms like fatigue, nausea, dizziness, or breathlessness, making diagnosis more challenging.

Call **999**

Even if you've recently received a Heart Health Check from Heart Research UK and your results were good, if you experience symptoms of a heart attack you must seek medical help immediately.

# What Risks Can I Do Something About?

## In This Section:

- Blood Pressure
- Cholesterol
- Body Composition

## Know Your Numbers

Your heart beats around 100,000 times a day, working continuously to pump blood around your body. Like any part of your body under constant demand, it performs best when the factors you can control are kept within a healthy range.

That's why knowing your numbers matters. When they fall outside of healthy ranges, your risk of conditions such as heart disease, heart attack or stroke can increase over time, often without obvious symptoms.

The good news is that small changes can make a big difference. This section will help you understand what each of these risk factors means, why they matter, and the simple steps you can take to improve your heart health.

## What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against your artery walls as your heart pumps it around your body. It naturally rises and falls throughout the day. The top number, called systolic pressure, measures the force when the heart contracts. The bottom number, diastolic pressure, measures the pressure when the heart relaxes and refills with blood and oxygen.

## 3 Steps to Reduce Blood Pressure



### Aerobic Exercise

Improves heart function and can lower blood pressure over time. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity (five 30-minute sessions) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (three 25-minute sessions) per week.

What counts as moderate or vigorous depends on your fitness level. For beginners, a brisk walk may be moderate; for regular walkers, a light jog might be better. A good guide: if you can talk but not sing, you're at moderate intensity; if you can't hold a conversation, you're at high intensity.

Start small and gradually build up – what matters most is getting started.

**See page 24 for more information about aerobic exercise.**



## Reducing Salt Intake

Reducing salt intake supports healthy blood pressure. Too much salt causes the body to retain fluid, increasing blood volume and pressure. Cutting back helps your body release excess fluid and reduces strain on blood vessels.

Most salt comes from processed foods, such as bread, cheese and takeaways (not just the salt you add at the table). Cooking from scratch can help you control how much salt you eat. Aim for no more than **6g of salt a day** (about 1 level teaspoon) and try to choose whole, unprocessed foods where possible.



## Smoking and Alcohol Consumption

Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption are major contributors to high blood pressure, as both can damage blood vessels and increase heart rate.

**See page 47 for more information about how to reduce your alcohol intake and stop smoking.**

# How to Take Your Blood Pressure

Getting an accurate reading is just as important as taking the reading itself.

## Ensure

- ✔ You've got an empty bladder
- ✔ That you sit upright with your back supported
- ✔ Your feet are flat on the floor
- ✔ That your arm is rested on a table at heart level
- ✔ The cuff is placed on bare skin
- ✔ You stay still and quiet
- ✔ Take two readings one minute apart and average them

## Avoid

- ✘ Caffeine\*
- ✘ Smoking\*
- ✘ Exercise\*
- ✘ Taking a reading straight after rushing around
- ✘ Talking during the reading

\* for 30 minutes before

# Take Control of Your Blood Pressure

Have you ever felt worried about your blood pressure? Or wondered if there's a simple, evidence-based way to manage it from home?

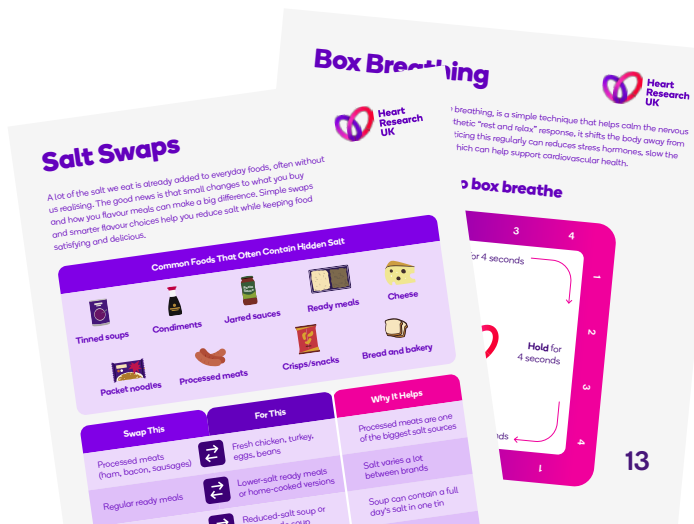
Join our 6-Week blood pressure email journey, designed to help you take control of your blood pressure and support a healthy heart with confidence.

## Over Six Weeks, You'll Receive:

- Easy-to-understand blood pressure education
- Practical, science-backed tips to help reduce blood pressure
- Free resources you can use straight away
- Simple, achievable weekly goals to keep you motivated
- Ongoing encouragement to build lasting, heart-healthy habits

This journey is supportive, realistic, and designed to fit into your everyday life. If you're ready to feel more in control of your health and take positive steps toward a healthier heart, we'd love to have you join us.

**Start your 6-Week Blood Pressure Journey today!**



## What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a type of fat made by the liver and found in some foods. It's essential for building cell membranes, producing vitamin D, and making hormones but when it is too high or out of balance it can be harmful.

**Total cholesterol** includes both good and bad types. HDL is the “good” cholesterol and non-HDL is the “bad” cholesterol that contributes to plaque buildup.

**HDL cholesterol** helps clean your blood by carrying extra cholesterol from your arteries back to your liver, where it can be broken down and removed.

**Total-to-HDL** ratio shows the balance between all the cholesterol in your blood and the “good” HDL cholesterol. It helps assess your risk of heart disease; the lower the ratio the better as this means there is more “good” cholesterol compared to total.

## 3 Steps to Support Healthy Cholesterol



### Healthy Fats

Found in avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and oily fish like salmon or mackerel – can help raise HDL (good) cholesterol and lower non-HDL (bad) cholesterol.

Include one source of heart-healthy fat daily, but limit oily fish to twice a week.



## Fibre

Supports overall health, but soluble fibre specifically helps lower cholesterol. It forms a gel in the gut that binds to cholesterol, reducing its reabsorption and helping remove it from the body – this can lower non-HDL (bad) and total cholesterol levels. Aim to include at least two of the following daily:

- Oats or barley
- Beans, lentils, or chickpeas
- Apples, pears, or citrus fruits
- Carrots, sweet potatoes, or avocados

**See page 44 for more information on eating more fibre.**



## Exercise

Regular physical activity helps increase HDL (good) cholesterol, which removes excess non-HDL (bad) cholesterol from the bloodstream. It also improves overall heart function and circulation.

**See page 23 for more information on where to start with exercise.**

## What is Body Composition?

Body composition refers to the makeup of your body – mainly fat, muscle, and bone. At Heart Research UK, we use bioelectrical impedance scales to measure BMI, body fat percentage, and visceral fat.

BMI (body mass index) is calculated as weight (kg) ÷ height (m<sup>2</sup>). It can indicate cardiovascular risk, though the healthy range may differ across ethnic groups.

Body fat percentage shows how much of your body is fat. While some fat is essential, too much raises heart disease risk.

Visceral fat surrounds your internal organs. High levels increase pressure on these organs and raise your heart disease risk.

## 3 Steps to Positively Impact Body Composition



### Strength training

Do strength exercises (like weights, resistance bands, or bodyweight movements) 2–3 times a week. This builds lean muscle, boosts metabolism, and helps reduce body fat over time.

See **page 25** for more information on **exercise**.



## Protein

Eating more lean protein supports fat loss and muscle gain by increasing metabolism, keeping you full, and preserving muscle during weight loss. Include a protein source with every meal and snack.

### How much protein is in foods?

- 1 medium sized boiled egg = 6g
- 1 skinless chicken breast = 35g
- ½ cup of cottage cheese = 14g
- 1 salmon fillet = 25g
- ½ cup of cooked lentils = 9g
- ½ cup cooked quinoa = 4g
- ½ cup tofu = 10g
- ½ cup cooked chickpeas = 7g
- 1 tbsp peanut butter = 4g

### How much protein should you eat?

#### For general health:

0.8–1.0g protein per kg of body weight.

#### For weight loss/muscle gain:

1.5–2.0g per kg may be more effective.

#### Example:

A 68kg person needs 68g for general health, or 102–136g for fat loss.



## Healthy Weight Loss

To lose weight we need to create a calorie deficit. While calorie counting isn't the only factor in fat loss, it's one of the most effective for healthy individuals. On average, women need 2,000 calories per day and men 2,500. To lose about 1–1.5 lbs per week, reduce intake by around 500 calories.

## TDEE (Total Daily Energy Expenditure)

For more accuracy, calculate your TDEE online or by using the below instructions. Subtract 500 calories to create a daily deficit. Recalculate as you lose weight to keep progressing.

### How to Calculate Your TdEE

#### Step 1

Calculate your Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR) – this is the energy you burn each day just to keep you alive, i.e. breathing etc.)

#### Men

$$\text{BMR} = (10 \times \text{weight}(\text{kg})) + (6.25 \times \text{height}(\text{cm})) - (5 \times \text{age}) + 5$$

#### Women

$$\text{BMR} = (10 \times \text{weight}(\text{kg})) + (6.25 \times \text{height}(\text{cm})) - (5 \times \text{age}) - 161$$

#### Step 2

Multiply your BMR by the appropriate activity level show in the following table.

Activity Level	Description	Multiplier
Sedentary	Little to no exercise. Mainly sitting/lying down	1.2
Lightly active	Lightly active	1.375
Moderately active	Moderate exercise or sports 3–5 days per week	1.55
Very active	Hard exercise or sports 6–7 days per week	1.725
Super active	Very intense daily exercise or physical job	1.9

## Example

Female 75Kg, 170cm height, age 35:

$$\text{BMR} = (10 \times 75\text{kg}) + (6.25 \times 170) - (5 \times 35) - 161$$

$$= 750 + 1062.5 + 175 - 161$$

$$= 1476.5 \text{ kcal/day}$$

TDEE = She is lightly active

$$= 1476.5 \times 1.375$$

$$= \mathbf{2030 \text{ kcal/day}}$$

This is the estimated number of calories she would burn a day based on her BMR and activity level.

- For weight maintenance, she should aim to eat this number of calories per day.
- For weight loss, it is recommended that she deducts 500 from this number.

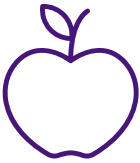
As body weight and activity levels change over time, it's important to recalculate your TDEE regularly to ensure this number remains accurate.

## Healthy Weight Gain

To healthily gain weight while supporting heart health, focus on nutrient-dense, calorie-rich foods. Include healthy fats from avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil – they boost calories without raising bad cholesterol.

Eat regular, balanced meals and snacks throughout the day to increase intake without relying on processed or high-saturated-fat foods that may harm your heart.

### 3 Steps to Increase Body Weight and Body Fat Percentage in a Healthy Way



#### Calorie-Dense, Nutrient-Rich Foods

Prioritise the consumption of whole foods that are high in calories and nutrients, such as nuts, nut butters, avocados, whole grains, olive oil and fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout and sardines. Sprinkling seeds like chia, flax, sunflower and pumpkin on salads, in sandwiches and on porridge helps increase both calories and nutrients.



## Meal Frequency And Portion Sizes

Aim for 5–6 meals or snacks daily, even if your appetite is low. Gradually increase portion sizes to stay in a consistent calorie surplus (eating more than you burn).

Smoothies are a great option – blend yoghurt or cottage cheese with a little fruit, nut butter, or avocado for a calorie-dense, nutrient-rich snack that’s easy to digest.

**See page 18 for how to calculate your needs.**



## Exercise

Regular physical activity supports heart health, but avoid excessive cardio, which can lead to muscle loss. Prioritise strength training - it helps preserve and build muscle, supports a balanced physique, and can naturally boost appetite by increasing your body’s nutrient demands. This can make it easier to eat more when trying to gain weight.

# Risk Factors: The Big 5

## In This Section:

- Physical Activity
- Diet
- Sleep
- Stress
- Substances (Alcohol and Smoking)

## What is Physical Activity?

Physical activity is defined as ‘any movement of the body that requires energy’. Being physically active is one of the best ways to prevent heart disease, through lowering blood pressure, reducing inflammation, and improving cholesterol. While reducing sedentary time and reaching step goals is beneficial, it’s not enough on its own. To truly protect your heart, include a variety of higher-intensity activities that get your blood pumping and muscles working – not just easy movement.



## 2 Types of Physical Activity

<b>Aerobic</b>	
<b>Moderate*</b>	<b>Vigorous*</b>
Your breathing should increase but having a conversation should still be possible.	Your breathing should be fast and talking is difficult.
<b>Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brisk walking</li><li>• Swimming</li><li>• Cycling</li><li>• Dancing</li><li>• Aerobics</li></ul>	<b>Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Running</li><li>• Spin</li><li>• HIIT workouts</li><li>• Rowing</li><li>• Zumba</li></ul>
<b>Benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strengthens the heart</li><li>• Lowers blood pressure</li><li>• Improves cholesterol balance</li><li>• Improves circulation and oxygen delivery</li></ul>	

\*The intensity of an activity depends on your fitness level and how hard it feels for you. The same activity can be moderate for one person and vigorous for another.

## **Strength**

Any exercise that challenges your muscles using resistance.

## **Examples**

- Bodyweight training e.g squats, push-ups
- Weightlifting
- Resistance training
- Yoga
- Pilates

## **Benefits**

- Supports healthy body composition
- Lowers blood pressure
- Improves blood sugar control
- Reduces inflammation
- Preserves muscle mass and bone density

# Resistance Training

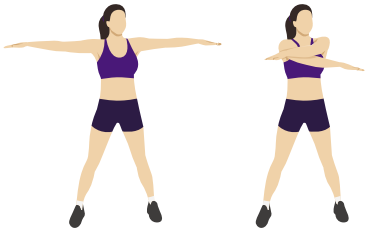
## Where to Start

- ✔ Aim to complete this short workout at least twice a week.
- ✔ For each of the following exercises:
  - perform 10–20 controlled repetitions
  - take 1–5 minutes of rest as needed
  - then repeat the exercise 2 more times before moving on to the next exercise.



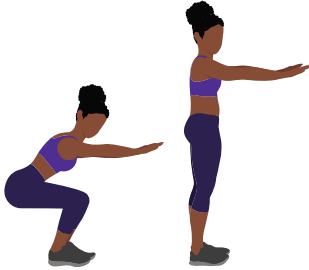
## Use it or Lose it ?

From around the age of 35, muscle mass can decline by around 1% per year if it isn't regularly used. Strength-based activity helps slow this loss and protect long-term health.



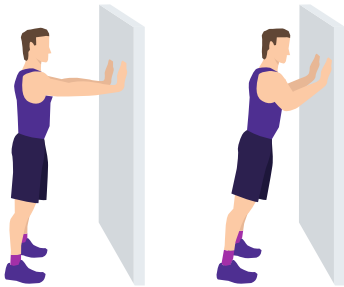
## Dynamic Stretches

(Warm-up) stretches that are done with movement. For example: hip circles, leg swings, arm swings, lunges with a twist



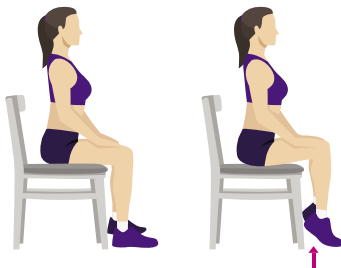
## Squats

Start seated in a chair with your feet shoulder-width apart. Slowly stand up, then return to the chair with control.



## Press Up

Stand facing a wall with your hands against it and arms straight. Slowly bend your arms to lean towards the wall, then push yourself back to the starting position.



## Calf Raises

Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Slowly raise your heels so you come up onto your tiptoes and squeeze your calf muscles, then slowly lower your heels back down.



## Lunges

Stand with both feet together, using a wall or chair for support if needed. Step one-foot forwards, then return it to the starting position. Alternate legs.



## Row

Sit on a chair and lean forwards so your chest is facing the floor. Let your arms hang down, then with straight or slightly bent arms, lift your arms out to the sides and squeeze your shoulder blades together before slowly lowering.



## Static Stretches

A stretch that is performed without movement and stretches your muscles.

It is important to warm your muscles and joints up gradually before exercise to prevent you from getting injured. Ensure you warm up all the muscles you plan to use during your workout.

Static stretches are best performed after a workout to help your muscles and joints to cool down, bringing your heart rate back to normal. Ensure you stretch all the muscles you have used during your workout.


**Focus on good form.** Move in a slow, controlled way and avoid holding your breath.

**Pain is not normal.** Mild muscle soreness is okay, but stop if you feel sharp pain, dizziness, or chest pain.

**Intensity** means how hard your muscles are working. Aim for a moderate intensity, where the exercise feels challenging, but your form remains good.

Intensity can be increased safely by adding more weight, resistance or repetitions to your chosen exercise. Ideally, you want to make an exercise feel more challenging once it feels too easy. This allows your muscles, joints and bones to become stronger over time.

Download our  
DIY home workout  
resource today



Heart Research UK

### Design your own home workout

1. Choose one exercise from each box
2. Warm up for 2 minutes, then have a 1 minute rest
3. Complete movements 1 to 6 (1 minute exercise, 1 minute rest)
4. Repeat step 3
5. Cool down for 2 minutes

By completing this workout 3 times a week, you'll be well on your way to meet your physical activity target!

Key  
Easy Medium Hard

Warm up (2 minutes):

Illustration of five diverse women performing various exercises: one in a purple leotard, one with a basketball, one with dumbbells, one with a ball, and one with a hula hoop.

# How Much Weekly Activity Should I Do?

**75 mins**  
of vigorous activity

**150 mins**  
of moderate activity

**or**

## **do a combination of activity**

Different activities of different intensity all add up,  
just keep moving.



**2 days**  
each week of strength training

A blanket rule is to **aim for at least 6,000 steps per day** (this equates to around 60 minutes of walking).

Keep the body moving every day.

Over time, your strength and fitness levels should increase. As activities get easier, ensure you find ways to make them harder by either increasing intensity for aerobic activities or adding weight for strength activities.

Starting exercise can feel daunting, especially if you haven't been active for a while. The most important first step is to start moving regularly – then build it up gradually.

Walking is a great place to begin, but for heart health it should become brisk and purposeful and ideally be combined with other activities over time.



**Scan the QR code to read our Healthy Tips and grab more helpful downloads like our DIY home workout.**

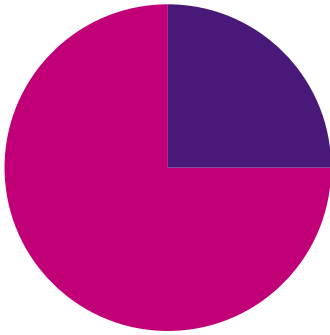
Aim for  
**6,000**  
steps per day

## Why Diet Matters

What you eat plays an important role in your heart health.

Over two-thirds of heart disease deaths worldwide are linked to diet. The good news is that you don't need a perfect diet to protect your heart. Small, consistent changes, made most days, can lower your risk and improve your long-term health.

Rather than focusing on individual foods or nutrients, the strongest evidence shows that overall eating patterns matter most.

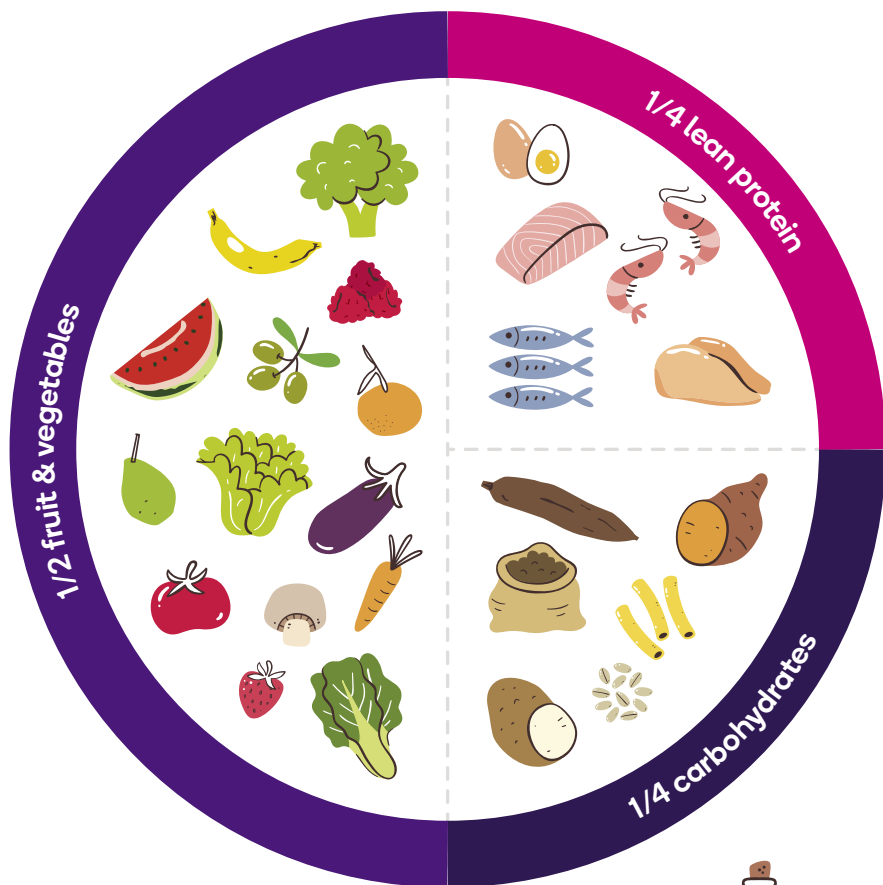


**Over two-thirds  
of heart disease  
deaths worldwide  
are linked to diet.**

## Build a Balanced Meal

A simple way to eat for heart health is to use the **heart-healthy plate method**, shown on the next page. This helps balance your meals, making sure you're eating nutritious foods in the right proportions without overthinking it. **For most meals you want to have a healthy source of protein, fat and carbohydrate.**

The heart-healthy plate method helps you get a balance of nutrients, supports steady energy levels, and can help maintain a healthy weight.



\*Use a small drizzle of oil when cooking or dressing food, or a thumb-sized portion of nuts, seeds, or avocado.



### Aim for:

- 1/2 your plate vegetables and/or fruit
- 1/4 lean protein
- 1/4 carbohydrates (preferably wholegrain)
- A small amount of healthy fats

## Here's What This Can Look Like Across a Day:

### Breakfast

- Bowl of oats, berries and yoghurt with a small amount of peanut butter drizzle or seed mix

### Lunch

- Wholemeal bread (wholegrain carbs)
- Tuna or chicken (lean protein)
- Salad (lettuce, tomato, cucumber)
- Side of fruit
- Small amount avocado (healthy fat)

### Dinner

- Salmon (protein/healthy fat)
- Roasted vegetables (broccoli, carrots, peppers)
- Potatoes or brown rice (carbs)



## Meals Planned for You

How do we plan our meals to ensure they contain all the essential heart healthy nutrients to keep our cardiovascular health in tip top condition?

We've taken the guess work away, say hello to our Daily Meal Plans, calorie and nutrient counted for your convenience.

Choose our **High Fibre** plan if you're aiming to support healthy cholesterol, our **High Protein** menu if you're wanting to lose weight or our **Vegan** plan if you want to eat more plant-based, whatever your goals, there's a plan for you.



Scan the QR code to download your free plan today.

## What Does One Portion Look Like?

Here is an example of a quick, easy way to measure out one portion of common foods.

**Butter and Oil**

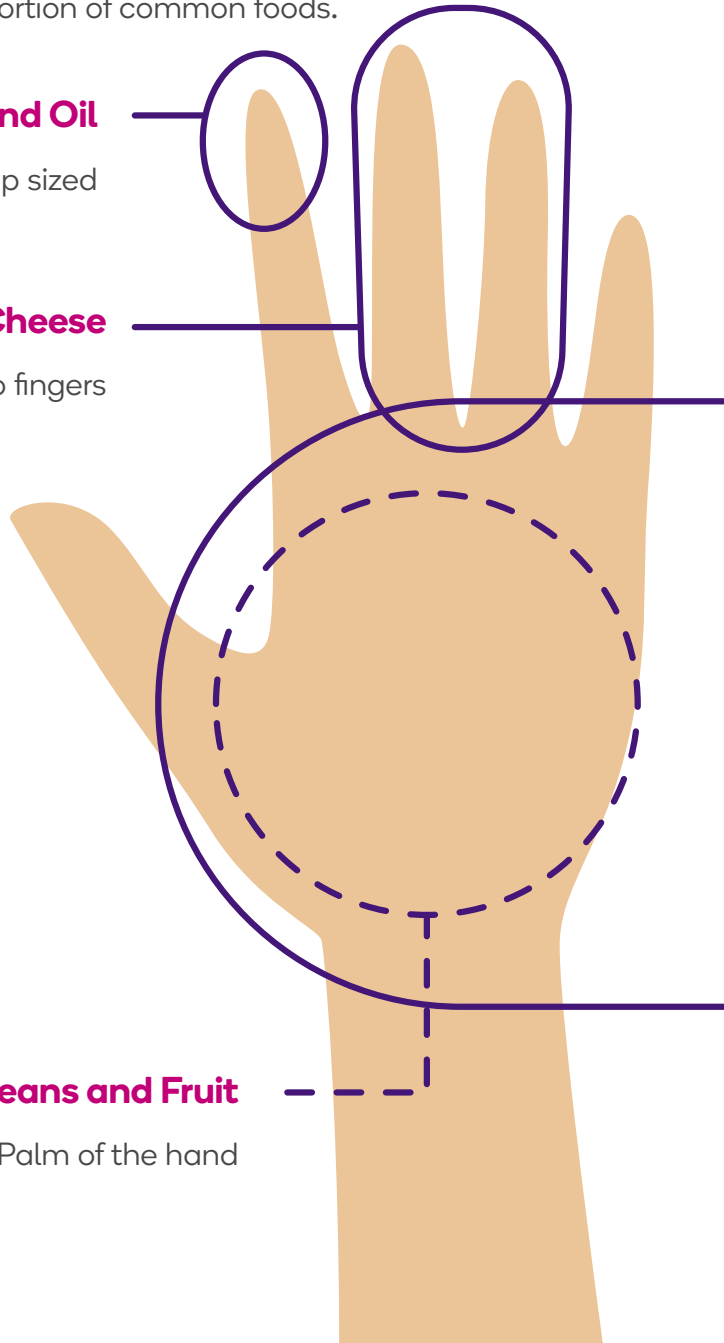
Fingertip sized

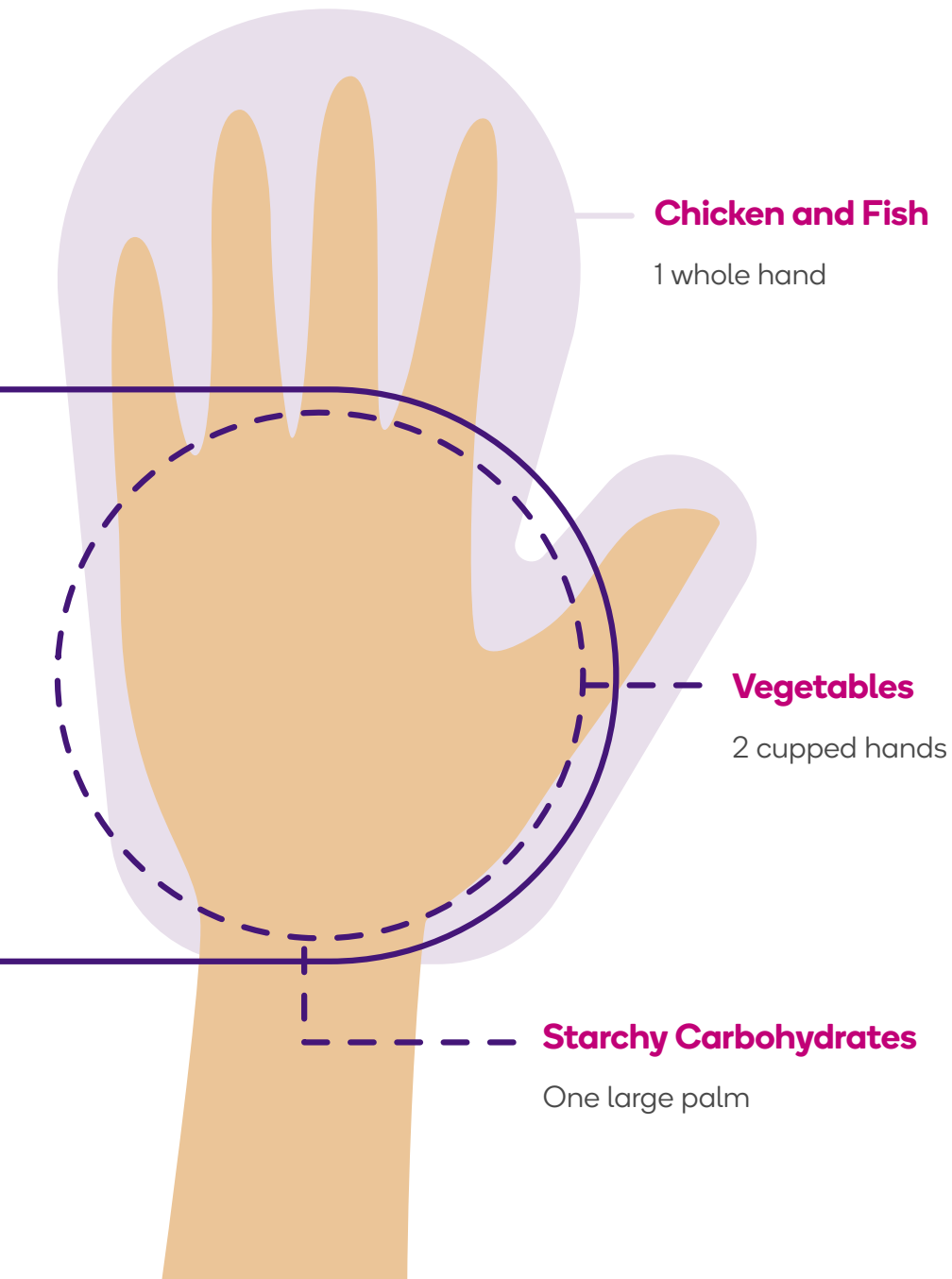
**Cheese**

Two fingers

**Meat, Beans and Fruit**

Palm of the hand





**Chicken and Fish**

1 whole hand

**Vegetables**

2 cupped hands

**Starchy Carbohydrates**

One large palm

## A Heart-Healthy Eating Pattern

One of the most researched and heart-healthy eating patterns is the **Mediterranean diet**. It isn't a strict diet, but a way of eating that focuses on whole, nourishing foods

### Mediterranean-style eating includes:

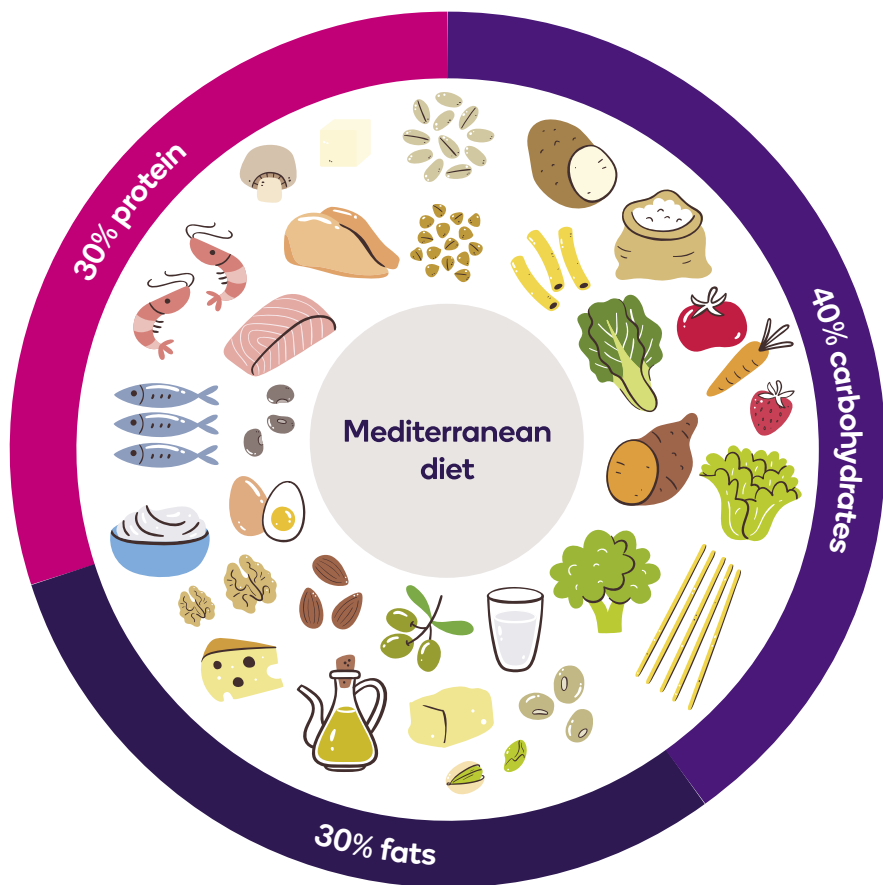
- ✔ Plenty of vegetables, fruit, beans, lentils, and whole grains
- ✔ Lean proteins like fish, chicken, eggs, and plant proteins
- ✔ Moderate amounts of dairy such as milk, yoghurt, and cheese
- ✔ Healthy fats such as olive oil, nuts, and seeds

### Limit:

- ✘ Processed and red meats
- ✘ Refined carbohydrates (white bread, white rice, sweets, biscuits, pastries)
- ✘ Foods high in salt, saturated fat, and added sugars
- ✘ Alcohol

### Aim to eat fish regularly

Include two portions of oily fish each week (such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, or trout).



### Did You Know?

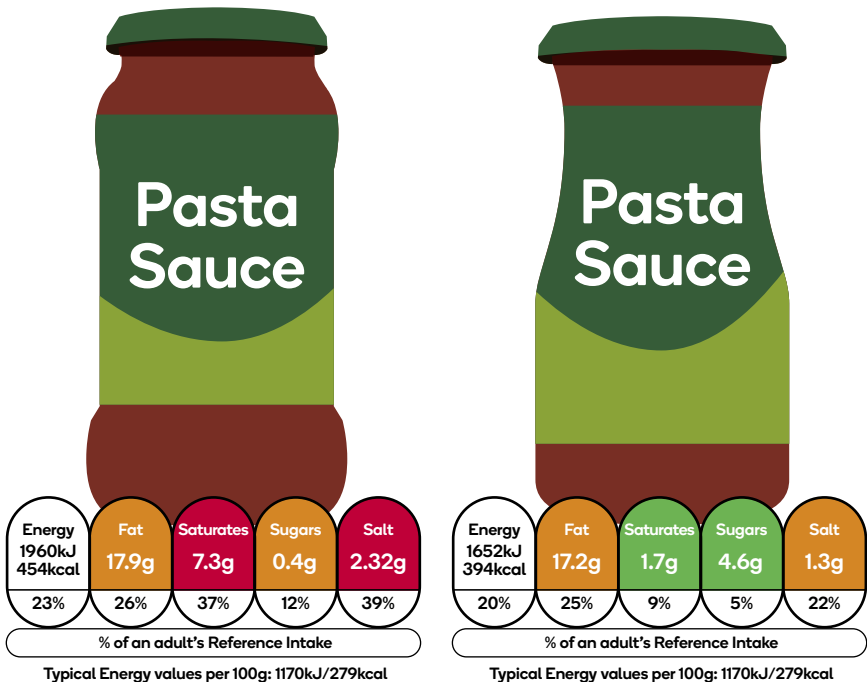
Following a Mediterranean-style way of eating is not only great for heart health but has also been shown to support brain health and cognitive function.

## Eat Mostly Real Food

**Real foods** are foods in their natural or minimally processed form, such as vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, lentils, lean meats, eggs, nuts, and seeds. These foods tend to provide more vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that support heart health.

Some highly processed foods contain **added salt, saturated fat, and free sugars**, which can affect heart health if eaten often.

Some packaged foods can still be useful and healthy, such as frozen vegetables, canned beans, tinned fish, or simple tomato sauces.\*



When choosing packaged foods, check labels and aim for options **lower in:**

- ✔ Salt
- ✔ Saturated fat
- ✔ Free sugars

### **It's about balance, not perfection.**

Aim to eat mostly whole or minimally processed foods by cooking from scratch with fresh ingredients most of the time.

## **Top Tips for Using Labels**

1. **Check the portion size:** Labels sometimes show nutrients per half a jar or packet. Always check the amount you actually eat.
2. **Compare similar products:** Look for products that are lower in salt, saturated fat, and free sugars, and higher in fibre and/or protein.
3. If choosing between two options, **pick the one lower in salt, saturated fat, and free sugars**, and higher in fibre or protein if possible.
4. **Don't worry about every ingredient:** Some additives, stabilisers, or emulsifiers are safe. Focus on overall nutrient content rather than scary-sounding names.
5. **Use labels to improve choices**, not avoid packaged foods entirely: Packaged foods like tinned beans, tomato sauces, or frozen vegetables can still be healthy. Labels help you pick the best option.



## Did You Know?



- ⊗ Adults should have **no more than 6 grams of salt per day.**

This equates to 1 level teaspoon of salt.



- ⊗ Adults should consume **no more than 30 grams of free sugars\* per day.**

This equates to 7 sugar cubes.

\*Free sugars are any sugars added to food or drinks, plus those in honey, syrups, nectars, and unsweetened fruit / vegetable juices, smoothies or purees.



# Take Control of Your Heart Health!

Up to 90% of heart disease deaths are linked to risk factors you can change

Sign up for our Healthy Tip email and get:

- Free heart health resources
- Delicious, heart-friendly recipes
- Expert tips to stay on track

**28-day Stop Smoking Tracker**

Follow up 28 days and share your progress that you are free from smoking. Only record smoking by yourself. Use the checkboxes to track all week long. You can use a sticker too.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14	Day 15	Day 16	Day 17	Day 18	Day 19	Day 20	Day 21	Day 22	Day 23	Day 24	Day 25	Day 26	Day 27	Day 28
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**Know your numbers**

Category	Healthy target	Follow up	Systemic blood pressure	Diabetic target
Low	Below 90	Below 90	Below 120	Below 130
Healthy target	90-120	90-120	120-130	130-140
Follow up	120-140	120-140	140-160	160-180
High	140-160	140-160	160-180	180-200
Very High	Above 160	Above 160	Above 180	Above 200

**My blood pressure (BP) reading**

Date	Time of day	Diastolic



Take the first step  
Scan the QR code  
and subscribe today!

# The Importance of Fibre

Dietary fibre is the part of plant foods we can't fully digest. It helps lower cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, regulate blood sugar, and support weight management – all of which protect against heart disease.

## Great fibre sources include:



- Vegetables and fruit
- Nuts and seeds  
(chia seeds and flaxseeds are great sources)
- Oats (contain beta-glucan which is especially good for keeping cholesterol levels healthy)
- Lentils, beans and chickpeas
- Popcorn (home popped)
- Dark chocolate (70% or higher cacao content)

## How Much Fibre?

We should aim to consume 30g of fibre every day for optimal health. Here are some examples of how much fibre is in certain foods.

- 1 medium apple 4.4g
- ½ cup kidney beans 6g
- 1 medium cooked carrot (skin on) 2g
- 1 tbsp chia seeds 4g
- 3 broccoli florets 3g

## How to Eat 30g of Fibre a Day:

- ✔ 5 servings of vegetables, 2 servings of fruit.
- ✔ Choose wholegrains with at least 2 meals a day – quinoa, brown rice, wholewheat bread/pitta/bagel, oats, popcorn, Weetabix) etc.
- ✔ Use a seed sprinkle on salads, mix into breakfast cereals and porridge and even in sandwiches or on top of egg on toast.
- ✔ Choose, veggies, fruit and nuts for snacks.
- ✔ Have a salad or vegetable-based starter before meals.
- ✔ Incorporate beans, lentils and chickpeas into your weekly diet – add kidney and black beans to chilli, add lentils to spaghetti bolognese for example.

## Label Tip (for packaged foods):

When checking labels, fibre is usually listed per 100g.

- **High fibre: 6g or more per 100g**
- Lower fibre: less than 3g per 100g

Use this to compare similar products, higher fibre options support heart health.

# Sleep

Sleep is vital for heart health, helping regulate blood pressure, heart rate, and inflammation. Too little sleep disrupts hunger hormones, drives cravings for unhealthy foods, lowers energy, and makes it harder to stay active – all raising heart disease risk.

## How to Get Better Sleep

- ✔ **Environment** - Keep your room cool (~18°C), dark, and use natural fibre bedding. Red/orange lights can boost melatonin (your sleepy hormone) and improve sleep.
- ✔ **Screens** - Blue light from devices reduces melatonin, which supports sleep and heart health. Limit screen use before bed.
- ✔ **Stimulants** - Avoid caffeine after lunch; it stays in your system for up to 10 hours. Nicotine also disrupts sleep.
- ✔ **Natural light exposure** - Morning daylight helps reset your body clock. More time outdoors during the day improves sleep at night.

## Download our Sleep Improvement Plan



**Heart Research UK**

### Sleep Improvement Action Plan

Sleep is an essential cornerstone of good health and not getting enough of it, or experiencing poor quality sleep can negatively impact our health and contribute to the development of heart disease.

This action plan is designed to help you make intentional commitments toward improving your sleep. Below, you'll find a variety of strategies that can positively impact your sleep. Choose the ones that feel right for you or create personalised solutions that best suit your circumstances. By taking these steps, you can prioritise your sleep and support your heart health.

Make your bedroom cool (around 18°C)	No caffeine after midday	Fit blackout blinds	Read a book before bed	Get morning light exposure
No eating after 7pm	Have a bath before bed	No screens after 8pm	Practice mindfulness/ yoga etc	Bed by 10pm
Journaling before bed	Keep a sleep diary	Wake up at 7am every day	Sleep bedroom lamps for red bulbs	Physical activity during the day

## Stress

Chronic stress raises heart disease risk by driving up blood pressure, increasing inflammation, and encouraging unhealthy habits. Stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline disrupt metabolism, blood sugar, and fat storage – fuelling obesity and insulin resistance. Stress also harms sleep, further adding to heart risk.

### How to Work on Stress

- ✔ **Build stress-reducing activities into your day** – walks, exercise, yoga, meditation, or breathing exercises.
- ✔ **Time in nature lowers cortisol**, boosts mood, and **promotes relaxation**.
- ✔ **Schedule downtime for hobbies**, relaxation, or simply a peaceful cup of tea.

## Substances

Alcohol can harm your heart, disrupt sleep, increase blood pressure and cholesterol, and contribute to weight gain due to its high calorie content. It may also lead to poor food choices from fatigue. The NHS advises no more than 14 units per week, spread over three or more days – roughly six medium glasses of wine or six pints of 4% beer. Track your intake monthly and consider non-alcoholic alternatives, while watching for added sugars.

Smoking is a leading cause of heart disease, damaging blood vessels, raising blood pressure, and promoting artery plaque. Quitting is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk – get support to stop. Vaping also carries unknown long-term risks, so aim to quit that too.

# How Do We Actually Make Healthy Lifestyle Changes?

Most of us know what to do, it's the **DOING** it bit that we find difficult. Understanding the psychology behind behaviour change and implementing effective strategies to overcome obstacles and sustain motivation is key.

We've put together some helpful resources to get you started. Setting short and long-term goals is an effective first step to making changes, we've created a Goal Setting Planner to guide you through this process. In addition, our Healthy Heart Habit Tracker enables you to keep track of how well you are doing and help hold you accountable to your goals.



Download your  
Goal Setting Planner today



**Heart Research UK**

### Healthy Heart Goal Setting Planner

Setting short and long-term goals can help you make healthy lifestyle changes to support your heart health. Use the document to plan your goals for the year, month or even the week. When setting goals it can help to think about the acronym SMART, make sure your goals are:

- 1. Specific**  
Be clear about what you want to achieve, your goal should be detailed and clear.
- 2. Measurable**  
How will you track progress? Our Healthy Heart Habit Tracker Wheel is great for this!
- 3. Achievable**  
Is the goal realistic for you at your current level of fitness or in relation to how you currently eat for example?
- 4. Relevant**  
It doesn't matter what other's goals are, your goals need to be relevant to you and support what you want to achieve.
- 5. Time-bound**  
How long will it take for you to achieve your goal? Set a deadline.

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

**Heart Research UK**

Daily Habits

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

## **Additional Support**

If you're facing challenges or difficult situations, know that you don't have to go through it alone. This page is dedicated to guiding you to a variety of trusted charities and organisations that provide support across a range of issues.

### **BEAT - Eating Disorders Charity**

Website: [beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

### **MIND - Mental Health Charity**

Website: [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)

### **Drinkaware - Alcohol Awareness and Support**

Website: [drinkaware.co.uk](http://drinkaware.co.uk)

### **Samaritans - Emotional Support in Crisis**

Website: [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

Telephone: 116 123 (Free 24/7 helpline for emotional support)

### **Help to Stop Smoking:**

Visit [www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree) or call the Smokefree National Helpline on 0300 123 1044 (Mon-Fri 9am-8pm, Sat/Sun 11am-4pm) advisers are used to calls from people who are about to have a cigarette and want help not lighting up.

# Which Risks Can't I Change?

## In This Section:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Sex
- Family History

## Age

Cardiovascular risks increase with age so it's important to go for regular health checks when you reach 40 years old. Remember to get checked again every five years after that. None of us can prevent growing old, but there are things you can do to reduce your risk of heart diseases.

No matter what your age, it's important to think about how you can eat better and move more.

Making healthy choices now can help protect your heart in the future.

## Ethnicity

Due to complex biological and cultural factors, if you're South Asian, Black or of mixed ethnicity you are at increased risk of coronary heart disease. Guidelines for BMI are slightly different to people from a white ethnic background.

It's nothing to get overly worried about though. Research shows that you just need to take a little extra care to reduce your risks, especially if you're prone to excess weight around your waist or have a family history of heart disease, stroke or diabetes.

Whatever your ethnic background, remember that coronary heart disease risk can be reduced by living a healthy lifestyle.

## **Sex**

### **What's the Difference?**

Coronary heart disease generally affects more men than women. It is thought that hormones such as oestrogen may give some protection against coronary heart disease making women less likely to develop the condition than men. After the menopause, risk increases significantly and the gap between men and women narrows.

Women often experience different symptoms of a heart attack and tend to wait longer before calling 999. Whether you are male or female, you might not experience classic symptoms such as chest pain but might feel unusually breathless, tired and dizzy.

### **Is Heart Disease a Man's Problem?**

In the UK, men under the age of 75 are three times more likely to die from coronary heart disease than women of the same age. However, coronary heart disease remains one of the leading causes of death for women too. Women in the UK are more than twice as likely to die from coronary heart disease as breast cancer. Whatever sex you were born, coronary heart disease remains the UK's single biggest killer.

### **What Can You Do?**

Whether you're a man or a woman, early detection of coronary heart disease could help reduce your chances of having a heart attack. Make the most of your GP visits and ask them to check the health of your heart too.

## Family History

If your father or brother was under the age of 55 when they were diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, or your mother or sister was diagnosed under the age of 65, then you may be at higher risk of coronary heart disease, angina, heart attack, heart failure or stroke. Whilst hereditary factors play a part, behaviours such as smoking, physical activity and eating habits can also pass on from one generation to another.

You can't do anything about your family history, but you can choose to lower your risks through healthier choices.



Your willingness to have a healthier heart has brought you to this final page. You have battled the ups and downs of making healthier changes to your lifestyle. We are proud of you for every tiny change you have made.

**Your heart matters to us.**  
**Your story matters to us...**  
**so share it.**







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