About the British Heart Foundation
The British Heart Foundation is the nation’s heart charity, saving lives through pioneering research, patient care and vital information.

What you can do for us
We rely on donations to continue our vital work. If you would like to make a donation to the British Heart Foundation, please ring our credit card hotline on 0870 606 3399 or contact us through our website at bhf.org.uk/donate or send it to us at the address on the back cover.

British Heart Foundation website
You may find other useful information on our website at: bhf.org.uk
About this booklet

This booklet contains advice on how healthy eating can reduce the risk of developing coronary heart disease and how it can help people who already have coronary heart disease. It explains how what you eat and drink affects your heart, and gives some general guidelines for healthy eating. It looks in particular at the effects of:

- fruit and vegetables
- the different types of fats in foods
- weight and body shape
- salt, and
- alcohol.

We explain the technical terms used in this booklet on page 46.

This booklet does not replace the advice that your doctors, nurses or dietitians may give you, but it should help you to understand what they tell you.
Why eating well is important

If you have coronary heart disease, your doctor, nurse or dietitian may already have given you information about healthy eating and how to eat well for your heart. Perhaps you have already managed to make some changes. Maybe you have tried to make changes but have gone back to your old habits. Or perhaps much of the information in this booklet is new to you. Whatever stage you are at, we hope you find the information in this booklet useful.

Eating a well-balanced diet can help improve your general health, both now and in years to come. It can help reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease and some cancers. Eating healthily can also stop you gaining weight, which means reducing the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and arthritis. If you already have coronary heart disease, eating a well-balanced diet will also bring important extra benefits.
How healthy eating can help you

Eating healthily can:

- help lower your blood cholesterol level
- help keep your blood pressure down
- help you to maintain or reach a healthy weight and body shape
- reduce the risk of developing diabetes
- help prevent atheroma (fatty material) from building up in the inside walls of your arteries, and
- help prevent blood clots from forming.

If you have diabetes, you have a higher risk of getting coronary heart disease, so it’s particularly important that you eat healthily. For more information on diabetes, see our booklet *Diabetes and your heart*.
What is coronary heart disease?

The process of coronary heart disease begins when the coronary arteries (the arteries that supply the heart muscle with oxygen-containing blood) become narrowed by a gradual build-up of fatty material within their walls. This condition is called atherosclerosis and the fatty material is called atheroma.

How atheroma builds up

- Blood within the artery
- Atheroma (fatty deposits) building up
- Fatty deposits develop, restricting the blood flow through the artery.
In time the artery may become so narrow that it cannot deliver enough oxygen-containing blood to the heart muscle when it needs it – such as when you are doing exercise. The pain or discomfort that happens as a result is called **angina**.

A **heart attack** happens when a narrowed coronary artery becomes blocked by a blood clot.
How food and drink affect your heart

On the next three pages we give a summary of the main points about how to eat a healthy, balanced diet and how this can reduce the risk of developing coronary heart disease and help protect your heart. On pages 14-39 we give some more detail about each point.

Fruit and vegetables
Eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables can help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. Aim to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day. See page 14.