Get active, stay active

Keep your heart healthy by being active

BEATING HEART DISEASE TOGETHER
Introduction

This booklet explains how being active can help you reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD) and why that’s important.

It has information, tips and tools to help you understand more about physical activity and how you can be more active every day.

You can enjoy the benefits of being more active whatever your age, size or physical condition. You can build physical activity into your daily routine without ever slipping into lycra or joining a gym. Changing a few of your habits can soon add up to a more active lifestyle.

Being active is good for your health right now and will help you in the future too. It can help prevent and manage a variety of conditions including CHD, stroke and Type 2 diabetes. It can also improve the way you look and feel.

We’ve made this booklet to help you live your life as actively as possible now and for the rest of your life.

Many health problems can be helped by regular physical activity. But if you have a health problem, check with your doctor about the amount and type of activity that is right for you.

If you have a heart condition or you are at a higher risk of developing CHD – for example because you have high blood pressure – you should read our booklet Physical activity and your heart (HIS1).

This guide does not replace the advice your health professionals may give you based on their knowledge of your condition.
Why should you be active?

Every seven minutes, someone dies from a heart attack. If you are not active, you are more likely to have a heart attack than someone who is active.

- Coronary heart disease (CHD) by itself is the most common cause of death in the UK. Around one in six men and one in nine women die from the disease.
- Women are more than three times as likely to die of CHD as breast cancer.
- Men are more than four times as likely to die of CHD as prostate cancer.
- Being inactive is a major health risk and one of the main causes of death and disability in the UK.
- Physical inactivity is responsible for developing CHD in over one in five people in developed countries.
- Over six in ten men in England, and seven in ten women, don’t do the recommended amount of exercise.
- More than a quarter of adults in England are obese.
- Around six in ten adults in England have high blood cholesterol, which increases your risk of developing CHD.

Want to know more about your heart? Go to bhf.org.uk/knowyourheart and play our interactive learning tool presented by Dr. Hilary Jones.
What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the single most common cause of death for both men and women in the UK. It begins when your coronary arteries – the arteries that supply your heart muscle with oxygen-rich blood – become blocked or narrowed because of a build-up of fatty deposits.

In time, your arteries may become so narrow that they cannot deliver enough oxygen-rich blood to your heart muscle. This can cause **angina**. Angina is an uncomfortable feeling, tightness or pain in your chest which may spread to your arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach.

Sometimes the fatty deposits can become unstable, and a piece may break away causing a blood clot to form. If this blood clot blocks your coronary artery, part of your heart muscle will be starved of oxygen-rich blood and may become permanently damaged. This is a **heart attack**.

**Heart attacks can kill. If you think you or anyone else is having a heart attack, you should phone 999 for an ambulance immediately.**

If you want to know more, read our booklets *Heart attack* (H157) and *Angina* (H165).
How does physical activity help you?

Physical activity can help you avoid a range of health conditions including coronary heart disease (CHD). If you have a condition already, it can help you manage it better. It can also improve the way you look and feel.

Being more active now will make an immediate impact on your health and help protect it for the future too.

Being more active can help improve your quality of life. It’ll change how you feel, both mentally and physically.

Changes can include:
- having more energy
- feeling less stressed or anxious
- feeling more relaxed
- getting a healthier body shape and appearance.

You may also:
- sleep more easily
- find it easier to meet people and make friends
- feel less isolated and more in touch with other people
- have better concentration
- feel a sense of achievement from learning something new
- have more self-confidence.

Being active also helps to prevent illness in the long term by helping to prevent:
- CHD
- Type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure
- obesity
- some cancers (such as colon cancer).
Being active is helpful even if you already have a condition. It helps to manage and control:
- CHD (including angina)
- Type 2 diabetes
- being overweight or obese
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol levels
- joint and bone problems such as arthritis.

It has positive effects on your bone and muscle health, reducing your risk of:
- Osteoporosis
- Osteoarthritis
- back pain.

David’s story

A few years ago I had to work in an 11 storey building, with my office being at the top. The building was always busy, and the lifts always full or broken. I got fed up with waiting for lifts and started to walk up and down the stairs instead. Within a few weeks, I started to feel so much fitter. After a month or so, I never felt out of breath walking around – I couldn’t believe it! I was feeling much better overall. Since then I have looked at other ways to be more active in my day-to-day lifestyle. I now feel much more in control of my health.

David Carney, mid 50s, Manchester