The heart of the matter

If coronary heart disease (CHD) has affected you or someone you love, you'll know just what lies behind the statistics.

CHD kills one in four men and one in six women in the UK. These death rates are amongst the highest in the world.

Development of CHD is usually due to a combination of factors. The British Heart Foundation (BHF) plays a vital part in finding out more about these factors and in developing ways to fight heart disease.

There is plenty that YOU can do on a daily basis to help you or someone in your family firmly on the way to recovery.
What is the British Heart Foundation doing to fight heart disease?

As the UK’s largest independent charity committed to combating heart disease, we’ve been working for over 40 years to understand and control all kinds of heart problems. As a result, we’ve had a dramatic impact on prevention and treatment of heart disease in the UK.

We’ve been able to improve the lives of people living with a heart condition. For example, we’ve played a key role in developing coronary artery bypass surgery. In order to help people get back to a full a life as possible after a heart attack, we fund rehabilitation schemes, BHF Nurses and a wide range of self-help literature and videos.

We’ve alerted millions of people to the risks of heart disease and how to help prevent it. We know lifestyle has a lot to do with CHD so we run education programmes for adults and children to equip them with the information they need to help to avoid heart problems. We also keep health professionals and scientists abreast of our latest research results.
Five steps to a healthy heart

Your doctor or consultant will have stressed to you what a tremendous difference a few simple lifestyle changes can make in reducing your risk of having more heart problems. There’s no time to waste, so here’s a reminder of how you can improve your chances of recovery.

Healthy eating
What you eat has an effect on your heart. Too much saturated fat - from fatty meat, biscuits, cakes, chips and dairy products - clogs up your arteries and puts a strain on your heart. However fish, vegetables, fruit, lean meat and poultry, nuts, salad and semi-skimmed milk will help keep your heart in good order.

Be smoke free
If you smoke, you are twice as likely to have another heart attack. The best advice is give up, completely, now.

Go easy on alcohol
One or two drinks a day shouldn’t do you any harm. However, heavy or binge drinking will increase your chances of having another heart attack.

Be more active
Half an hour a day makes all the difference. Start off gently and build up gradually. Walking, cycling and swimming are particularly good for people recovering from a heart attack. Discuss your plans with your doctor.

Trim excess weight
The more overweight you are, the harder your heart has to work. If you’re overweight, maintain a healthy diet low in fat and increase your physical activity.
I feel better now than I ever have

I can honestly say that I am now feeling better than I did before the attack.

Since then, I've tried really hard to make positive changes to my lifestyle. I'm much more active, walking in my day to day life and working out at the gym. I also watch my diet, steering clear of high calorie fatty foods - but it's not easy; I'm still battling to lower my weight.

Having a heart attack has given me permission to put my health first, and this has meant learning to say "no". As a result I am much more relaxed, and enjoy the activities I have chosen to be involved with.

I'm still in contact with people from my heart support group - so not only did attending prove extremely useful at the time, the friends I have made provide me with a great deal of ongoing support and encouragement. The whole episode has meant a total re-think about the way I live, but I can honestly say that I am now feeling better than I did before the attack.

Honour Cowling
I’ve taken a hard look at my lifestyle

My chest pains started at home one evening, after a full day out at an adventure park with my two young boys. I decided to get checked out at the hospital - at 35 I was convinced I was far too young to have a heart problem, although I knew something quite serious was wrong. I was diagnosed with angina, and told I may previously have had a silent heart attack.

Things moved very quickly once my condition was diagnosed. First I had an angiogram and angioplasty, but the angina pains started again so just eight weeks later I had a triple bypass operation. My recovery was really boosted by attending a rehabilitation programme, and despite lowering the average age quite considerably, I really benefited from the advice and support it provided. Although things were tough to start with, I now feel very lucky. My doctor has assured me that the damage to my heart was minimal, and with my new attitude to diet and exercise, my life has a richer quality. I was back at work within 2 months, and regularly walk, cycle and swim to keep myself fit.

Rajesh Shah

I was back at work within 2 months, and regularly walk, cycle and swim to keep myself fit.