Physical activity and heart and circulatory diseases

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. Not being active enough is one of the reasons people get heart and circulatory diseases like heart attack and stroke.

This leaflet is for people at risk of heart and circulatory diseases because they are not active enough. Their risk is increased by being overweight, having high cholesterol, having high blood pressure or Type 2 diabetes. Getting your body moving is one important way to improve your heart health.
“I JUST DO 25 MINUTES AT HOME OF AN EXERCISE DVD, AND I SWIM EVERY SUNDAY. IT’S MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.”

Jasmine, age 57

What are heart and circulatory diseases?

Heart and circulatory diseases include conditions such as angina, heart attacks, strokes and vascular dementia.

Being inactive can lead to fatty material building up in your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood to your organs). If the arteries that carry blood to your heart get damaged and clogged, it can lead to a heart attack. If this happens in the arteries that carry blood to your brain it can lead to a stroke. The good news is there are ways to reduce the risk of this happening.
You can reduce your risk of heart and circulatory diseases by 35% by being more physically active.

Why should I be active?

High blood pressure, high cholesterol and Type 2 diabetes all increase the risk of developing heart and circulatory diseases. Being regularly physically active helps you to reduce your risk of developing these conditions.
How does physical activity reduce risk?

High blood pressure
Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger. A stronger heart can pump more blood with less effort. This means there is less pressure on your arteries (the blood vessels that take blood to your major organs), which helps your blood pressure stay at a healthy level.

High cholesterol
Physical activity raises your levels of good cholesterol which carries away the bad cholesterol, so it is less likely to clog up your arteries and cause a heart attack or stroke.

Type 2 diabetes
Physical activity helps you use up the extra glucose (sugar) in your blood. This can gradually lower your blood glucose levels.

Being overweight
If you need to manage your weight, being more physically active is important. Being active increases the number of calories you burn, which will help you lose weight.

We are all at risk of heart and circulatory diseases, we should all make sure we move around enough. Aim for at least 30 minutes every day.
Regular activity doesn’t just protect your heart. You can use it as a way to catch up with friends or meet new people. It can help improve your general health and wellbeing too.

**Get active and enjoy these benefits**

- Have more energy
- Feel more relaxed
- Achieve a healthier body weight
- Sleep better
- Have better concentration and memory
- Feel more confident

Always look out for ways to get bursts of activity into your day.

When we talk about being physically active, we don’t mean putting on sports kit and joining the gym. You don’t have to get hot and sweaty. We really are talking about getting up and moving around more. All these activities will help to improve your health:

- Walking
- Gardening
- Housework like vacuuming
- Taking the stairs instead of the lift
- Swimming
- Cycling

Feel great

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How much is enough?

To reduce your risk of heart and circulatory diseases, you need to be active every day. Aim to do 150 minutes of exercise a week – that’s about 20–30 minutes a day.

Every time you are active for 10 minutes or more – it counts. Make sure you do 10-minute bursts to add up to at least 20–30 minutes a day.

Do something for 10 minutes or more that makes you:

• breathe harder
• feel warmer
• feel your heart beat faster.

You should still be able to hold a normal conversation while you are active.

Find time

Finding time can be tricky, but if you fit activity into things you’re already doing, you’ll be a lot more likely to get into a habit you want to stick to. This could mean walking to school or work instead of driving, getting off the bus a few stops early or taking the stairs instead of a lift.

Try writing a list of everything you do in a day and see where you can slot in 10 minutes or more to be active.

Lots of little things build up to make a big difference.

Start small.

Every 10 minutes counts.
Seeing a difference

The best time to make a change is now. Think about what you can do right now to be active. You might not feel like it to start with but it gets easier over time, and in the end will just be a habit that you do without thinking about it.

Get moving now and it will help you enjoy life more and keep your risk of cardiovascular diseases down.

Active vs sedentary lifestyle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Sedentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brisk walk to or from station</td>
<td>Car to station and train to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the stairs</td>
<td>Using the lifts or escalators at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go for a 15–30 minute walk with a colleague/friend</td>
<td>Stay in office during your lunch break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisk 20 minute walk home from the station</td>
<td>Getting picked up from the station</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Active vs sedentary lifestyle

**Active**
- Preparing and cooking food yourself (30 mins)
- Playing with the children (1 hour)

**Sedentary**
- Ordering a takeaway for dinner
- Sitting down to watch TV as a family


Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. They cause heartbreak on every street. But if research can invent machines to restart hearts, fix arteries in newborn babies, build tiny devices to correct heartbeats, and give someone a heart they weren’t born with – imagine what’s next.

We fund research into all heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors. Heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, vascular dementia, diabetes and many more. All connected, all under our microscope. Our research is the promise of future prevention, cures and treatments.


You and the British Heart Foundation. Together, we will beat heartbreak forever.

**Beat heartbreak forever.**

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