



Chest
Heart &
Stroke

**What are Chest,
Heart and Stroke
conditions?**

Everyone in Northern Ireland knows someone who has suffered from a chest, heart or stroke condition. 40% of adult deaths are related to these illnesses – in a family of five people, this sadly means two of them.

Across Northern Ireland there are over 200,000 people living with these conditions which have a huge physical, emotional and social impact on the person themselves and on their family.

WHAT ARE CHEST, HEART AND STROKE CONDITIONS?

Chest or respiratory conditions include illnesses like COPD or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. This is the name used to describe a number of long-term lung problems which can make breathing difficult because the lungs are damaged or inflamed. Bronchitis and Emphysema are the most common conditions included under this umbrella term of COPD.

Heart disease is caused by the buildup of fatty deposits in the arteries, which can lead to angina or a heart attack. Heart attack is when part of the heart muscle dies because the blood flow to the heart has been interrupted, usually by a blockage in the coronary artery. A heart attack can lead to a cardiac arrest but they are not the same thing. A cardiac arrest is when the heart's electrical system

malfunctions which stops it pumping blood around the body. Other heart conditions can include congenital heart disease and irregular heart rhythms. Living with a heart condition can be very scary and some people can find it difficult to cope, but these conditions can be managed.

Stroke happens when the blood supply to part of the brain stops. Most strokes occur when a blood clot blocks one of the arteries which carry blood to the brain. If brain cells lose their supply of oxygen from the blood, they will be damaged or will die. Every stroke is different. Each person will have different lasting effects depending on the nature of the stroke and on how fast they receive help. Many people are left with disabilities following a stroke.

FRANK'S STORY



Frank was diagnosed with **COPD** in February 2014. He had smoked heavily for years, but had given up six months before his diagnosis.

In the early days, Frank was suffering an exacerbation or crisis every five or six weeks. Struggling for breath was terrifying for Frank, and extremely worrying for his family to watch. He had to sleep sitting upright as he found it difficult to breathe when lying down, and he had to give up golf.

He describes himself at the time as "a couch potato, waiting to die". He even began writing a 'death diary' noting all the financial and practical information his family would need when he was gone.

One day at the doctor's while picking up a prescription, he noticed a poster

from Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke. He called our Respiratory Support Co-ordinator who convinced Frank to come along to the Taking Control Self Management programme, despite him not believing that it could help.

However, he left the programme a different man. He now spends about two hours in the gym almost every day, is back to playing golf, and can sleep normally again. He hasn't experienced any exacerbations in 18 months... and he never bothered finishing his death diary.

Frank is now managing his COPD and doing well. However lung disease sadly kills six people per day in Northern Ireland.



**DON'T LET
COPD
CREEP UP ON YOU**

If you suffer from breathlessness, wheezing or a persistent cough, talk to your GP.

KEVIN'S STORY



In the middle of July 2014, Kevin Carlin started experiencing the worst heartburn he'd ever had. It lasted from Wednesday through to Friday and was so severe he was bent double at his desk.

By Friday Kevin was feeling a bit better. But what he didn't know was that the clot that had caused the heart pain was slowly moving from his heart to his brain.

On Saturday, when Kevin was at work, he suddenly lost the ability to speak and his face started drooping on one side. He was still able to walk so he went over to his boss and tried to explain that something was wrong. His boss immediately phoned an ambulance and in no time Kevin was in Altnagelvin Hospital being treated for a **STROKE**.

When the results of the blood tests came back, they showed that he had not only had a stroke – Kevin's indigestion had actually been a **HEART ATTACK**. That is what the pain had been, not heartburn!

Thankfully Kevin made a complete recovery from his stroke. He also had one stent put in to open his artery and help prevent another heart attack. Now he is fit and healthy, and doing everything he can to ensure it will never happen again.

Kevin was lucky that he survived his heart attack. There are 12 heart attacks every day in Northern Ireland with three people sadly dying.

Do you know the symptoms of a heart attack?

STOP

Something's not right – symptoms can start slowly

Tightness or pain in the chest, pain in the arm, neck or jaw

Other symptoms such as shortness of breath, nausea or sweating

Phone **999** immediately – the ambulance crew will do an ECG

ANN-MARIE'S STORY



Ann-Marie thought she had been bitten by an insect, but when she turned to ask her sister Ursula if her lip was swelling, Ursula saw that Ann-Marie's face was drooping and she recognised the symptoms of a **STROKE**.

Her sister asked her: "Can you lift your arms?" Ann-Marie replied: "Of course I can," – but she couldn't. As she replied, Ursula could hear that her sister's speech was slurred. Within 90 minutes Ann-Marie was being treated for a stroke in Craigavon Area Hospital. She was 46 years old.

Two years earlier, a hysterectomy had triggered an early menopause and Ann-Marie began taking HRT,

which gave her high blood pressure. In the lead up to her stroke, she also experienced a lot of headaches, tiredness and a feeling of heaviness in her leg.

After the stroke, Ann-Marie's aim was to get back to work. She took part in NICHHS's Post Rehabilitation Exercise programme, and was able to return to her job as a primary school teacher, even though fatigue can still be a struggle.

Ann-Marie was lucky that she survived her stroke, and wasn't left with a disability. Sadly three people die from stroke everyday in Northern Ireland.

Do you know the symptoms of a stroke?

F A S T

Has their **FACE** fallen at one side?

Can they raise both **ARMS**?

Is their **SPEECH** slurred?

TIME to call 999

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT CHEST, HEART AND STROKE ILLNESSES?

PREVENTION is better than cure!

So it makes sense to make healthy choices that reduce your chances of developing chest, heart or stroke conditions. If you are already living with a chest, heart or stroke condition, then making healthy choices will help you feel better and prevent a reoccurrence.

There are things you can't control which put you at higher risk of developing a chest, heart or stroke condition. Your age, your gender, your family history of heart attack, heart disease or stroke, and your genetics, can all affect your chances.

But there are some things that you can control...

If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, it means you have a greater chance of having a **HEART ATTACK** or **STROKE**. So it is important to have these checked regularly and to do what you can to keep them under control. Smoking, second hand smoke and hazards at work, such as dust or chemicals in the air, can cause **CHEST** conditions. So it's important to avoid these or use protective equipment where possible.



Stop Smoking



Watch Your Weight



Keep Physically Active



Eat A Balanced Diet



Moderate Your Alcohol Intake



Manage Your Stress Levels



Get Enough Sleep

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOU

Our Support Groups and Programmes offer a listening ear, emotional support, practical advice and signposting for people, and their families and carers, affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions. Like Frank, Kevin and Ann-Marie, the people attending the groups are able to meet with others in a similar situation who know what it's like. They also benefit from activities based around continuing rehabilitation, prevention of a recurrence and reducing isolation.

The support we offer includes:

- Family Support
- Activity Groups
- Post Rehabilitation Exercise Programme (PREP)
- Taking Control Self Management Programme
- Carers Groups
- Well NI Health Promotion Programmes

Contact us to find out more about your local respiratory, cardiac or stroke services, and how we can support you.

Every year we support over 4,000 people in Northern Ireland like Frank, Kevin and Ann-Marie. But we can't do this without your help.

To help us continue our vital work, visit nichs.org.uk/donate

For more information on any of these conditions, our support services or other programmes, please contact us or visit nichs.org.uk

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