

Pulse

Issue 1 2026

“I’m strong minded and I won’t let this beat me. My motto is ‘live life’.” – Mary’s story

Protect your heart – why blood pressure and cholesterol matter

Little hearts, big futures – the legacy of the Baby Hearts study

Healthy lunchbox recipes



Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Survivor Story



Mary CHEST

Mary McGrath, from Newtownabbey, has idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a condition that causes the lungs to become scarred and breathing increasingly difficult. Mary is awaiting a double lung transplant at just 48 years old and is bravely sharing her story to raise awareness of chest conditions.

Mary recalls; "I was in my twenties, studying to become a teacher, when I started to get very breathless walking upstairs. I felt really unfit, although I wasn't. I went to the doctor, but they couldn't really find much wrong with me. This continued over the next couple of years and after more investigations I was diagnosed with having hypersensitive pneumonitis which is an immune response to something you breathe in which results in inflammation of the lung tissue. It was idiopathic however which meant they couldn't define the cause of my condition. It has progressed to pulmonary fibrosis."

"Being diagnosed with this condition was hard to accept because I was very young, I had two young children, I hadn't graduated university yet, and they couldn't pinpoint why I had it. I was prescribed a cocktail of drugs, and I took high doses of steroids from 2007 on. Meanwhile, I finished university, graduated and got a post as a primary school teacher. After a few years, my health started to deteriorate. I was told I needed a double lung transplant to save my life, but I wasn't emotionally ready for that. The idea of a transplant knocked me for six and I just couldn't get to grips with it."

"The only other option was to try a heavy dose of steroids which thankfully started to work and cleared some of the inflammation in my lungs. Being on a high dose of steroids isn't pleasant however because it makes you feel very empty, so you eat a lot more and put on weight. My face also looked very distorted, but I was thankful I was still alive and didn't have to have the transplant of which I was so terrified."

Mary continues; "Moving through the years, I was off and on steroids and I was also on a chemotherapy drug as treatment. I never really had any time off work; I just kept on going even though I was breathless and had oxygen at home. Once the pandemic started however, I got a letter to shield and over the next two years my condition really started to impact me because the medication I was on had stopped working and I was starting to feel more breathless, feeling generally heavy in my body, not having the energy levels I used to, and I knew something wasn't right."

"In 2022 I was referred to a new consultant and respiratory nursing team, and they have been unbelievable. They did a revamp of my medication and I'm now what they class as stable again."

Talking about the impact of her condition Mary says; "Not being able to breathe is the scariest thing in the world. I started on oxygen about three years ago and when I went to the clinic they couldn't believe I was moving around, never mind going to work. Getting on oxygen has really helped me; it helps keeps me independent."

"I'm living a very different life to most 48-year-olds, however. I get up very early in the morning to get a shower as it takes so much out of me, and I have to have an oxygen tank outside the door. I have to sit down afterwards and rest. I'm sore and achy and it almost feels like you have a permanent flu."

"Things like doing the washing, hoovering, making a bed- a lot of people, 48 years old or even older, will find that quite normal, but that's not normal for me. I can't do things like that. With a condition like mine you have to find alternatives to the ways you used to do things and maybe just ask for help, and realise that's ok. I've also completed pulmonary rehab twice which was helpful, and I learnt a lot which I've applied to creating my own strategies to deal with my condition."

"I don't let my condition define me. I work full time, I achieved my Master's degree two years ago, and I'm a volunteer chair at a preschool. I want to live my life with my husband Jim who has become my carer, and Michael and Daniel my sons. I want to see my five grandsons grow up and that helps spur me on. I'm not saying I don't have down days, I do, but mostly I'm upbeat. I love my job, and I love the children I teach. It's hard and I'm exhausted some days but I'm not going to let this get the better of me. I'm not built like that and keeping busy helps me cope."

Long term however Mary will need to have a transplant; "After transplant, I will be on anti-rejection medications which will bring some challenges, and I will have to be monitored to make sure my condition is managed well. The positive is I'm a really good candidate for transplant because I don't have any other health conditions. It does worry me, but I keep that on the back burner until the day actually comes as I can't control things. I also see a clinical psychologist to help prepare for the transplant."

A place Mary has found great support is through our charity. "I was referred to NICHS by one of my respiratory nurses. One of the Care Services Coordinators, Darren, came to see me at home and took me through the charity's Family Support Service. He explained about the different services and programmes the charity could offer me. Darren was brilliant, and I loved that he had so much knowledge about my condition."

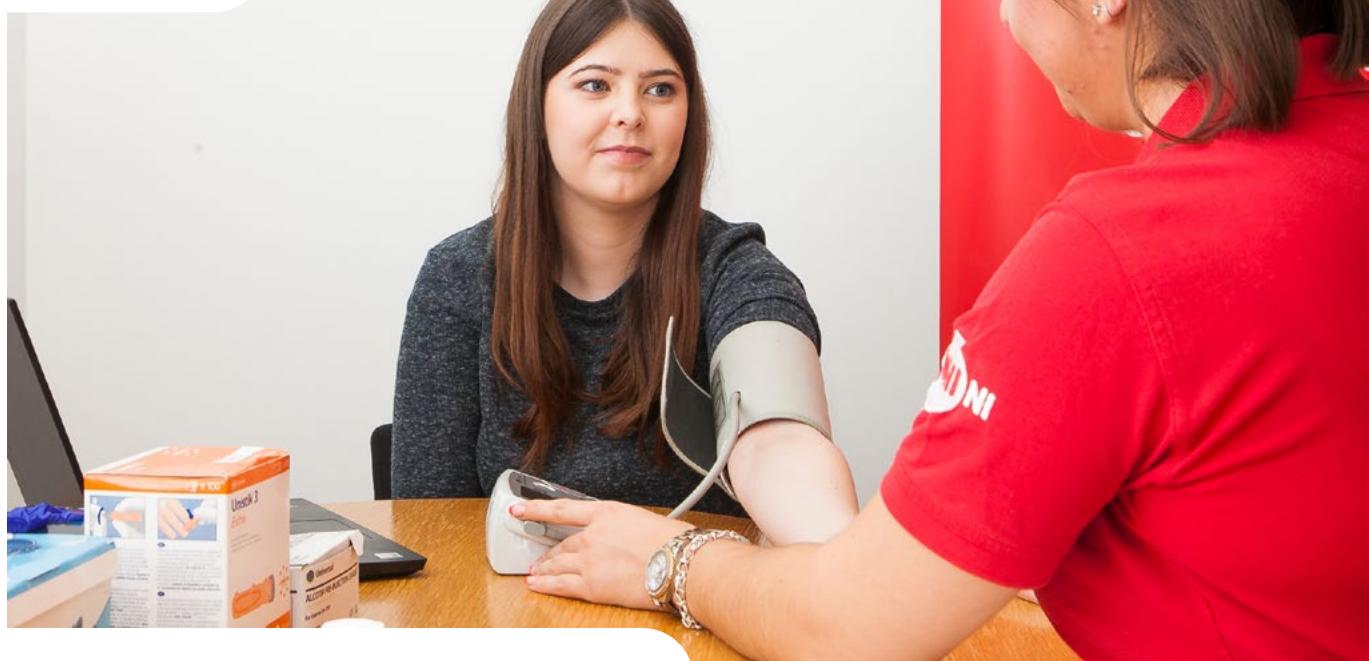
"I have had my condition for 20 years but getting support from NICHS over the past few years has been fantastic for me. Before I felt like I was just left to linger, especially with trying to hold down a full-time job with my condition. NICHS referred me to Ulster Supported Employment LTD, who have been great at helping me get what I need in place at work. They then put me in touch with Access To Work (NI) who organised even more support."

"My Coordinator Darren checks in with me regularly and I like that. It's like someone putting an arm around you. Before I felt alone and if you feel alone that can make your condition deteriorate so I would urge anyone with a respiratory condition to get in touch with the charity in case they can help them like they have helped me."

Mary concludes; "I'm strong minded and I won't let this beat me. For now, it's all about living life- going to concerts, going out for lunch, enjoying family time. My motto is 'live life', because that's what it's there for. Many people don't get to do that, and I know my situation isn't perfect but I'm still here and I'm going to live my life."

For more information on NICHS respiratory services, please visit nichs.org.uk/chest

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**



PROTECT YOUR HEART: WHY BLOOD PRESSURE AND CHOLESTEROL MATTER

Your heart is one of the hardest working muscles in your body. Day and night it pumps blood to every organ, fuelling your body and keeping your mind sharp. Your heart is your body's engine, yet heart disease remains the leading cause of death worldwide. The good news? Most heart problems are preventable. Taking care of your heart now can help you feel better and live longer.

Know Your Numbers

Two of the most important clues to heart health are blood pressure and cholesterol levels. High blood pressure, which is often called the 'silent killer', can damage and weaken your arteries long before you notice symptoms. Similarly, high cholesterol can lead to fatty buildup, narrowing arteries, making it harder for blood to flow and increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. That is why health experts and we at NICHs, stress the importance of regular blood pressure and cholesterol checks, even if you feel fine.



New Blood Pressure Guidelines

Blood pressure guidelines have recently been updated by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and are:

Non-elevated:
under 120/70 mmHg

Elevated:
between 121/81 and 139/89

High:
140/90 or higher

These new guidelines will help people identify problems early before too much damage is caused. If you have non-elevated blood pressure, continue to lead a healthy lifestyle to prevent it elevating or getting high. Remember, small changes like eating more healthily and being more active can bring blood pressure down without medication. If you have high blood pressure and your doctor has prescribed medication however it is important to take it as prescribed, alongside adopting a healthier lifestyle.

Easy Ways To Protect Your Heart

Protecting your heart does not always mean making big changes! Below are some small steps you can take towards a healthier lifestyle:

- ✓ **Don't smoke or get support to stop smoking.** Smoking harms your heart and blood vessels. If you don't smoke, don't vape.
- ✓ **Move your body.** Aim for at least 20-30 minutes each day of moderate intensity exercise like walking, dancing, or playing a sport that you enjoy.
- ✓ **Reduce salt intake.** Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt a day (about a teaspoonful) and children should have even less. This includes the salt already in our food plus what we add at the table.
- ✓ **Reduce alcohol consumption, or don't drink.** To keep the health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week and to spread these units out over the week. Also allow 2-3 alcohol free days a week.

✓ **Eat colourful foods.** Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. Frozen or canned foods count too.

✓ **Choose wholegrains and lean meats** or cheaper options such as **beans or pulses.**

✓ **Drink more water.** Cut down on soda and sugary drinks.

✓ **Relax.** Take time to rest, laugh, enjoy hobbies you love or have a cuppa with a friend.

Take Charge Of Your Health

Prevention and early detection of risk factors is key. Plan regular checkups, ideally once a year, to measure your blood pressure and cholesterol with your GP, local pharmacist or book a health check at NICHS. Buying a blood pressure machine is a sound investment so you can check your blood pressure at home, and your loved one's too.

Your heart works tirelessly for you. Taking a few moments to check your numbers and making heart-healthy choices is one of the best ways to return the favour.

HIS
NUMBER'S UP

**1 in 2 heart attacks & strokes
are linked to high blood pressure.**

**Check your blood pressure
to know your numbers.**

VISIT NICHs.ORG.UK



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Research



LITTLE HEARTS, BIG FUTURES – THE LEGACY OF THE BABY HEARTS STUDY

Every year in Northern Ireland, over 200 babies are born with heart issues known as Congenital Heart Disease (CHD). In most cases, there is no obvious reason or cause. That's why in 2013 we funded the pioneering Baby Hearts Study. With the help of the Children's Heartbeat Trust, Professor Helen Dolk and her team spoke with over 1,200 mothers across Northern Ireland to look at their health and lifestyle around the time they became pregnant.

The study helped us understand that a baby's heart development is influenced by a range of factors, many of which are part of our broader health and environment. The research highlighted how certain pre-existing conditions, like diabetes, can place extra pressure on a developing heart. While many people know that folic acid is important, Baby Hearts showed that natural folates, found in fresh fruit, are essential building blocks for baby heart health.

The study also looked at the "pile-on" effect of stress. It found that when families face multiple life challenges at once, it can affect pregnancy health. Perhaps most importantly, the study was able to rule out many common worries. It found no strong evidence that factors like a parent's weight or the use of common antidepressants were primary causes of these heart conditions. For many parents, this has helped lift a heavy burden of "what ifs".

A Growing Legacy

The success of Baby Hearts showed that Northern Ireland could be a leader in CHD research. It paved the way for the first-ever joint Professorship in the field in 2021, currently held by Professor Frank Casey. This post was specifically created to develop a formal research program in CHD on an all-island basis. In 2022, the then Health Minister launched a landmark £3.4 million 5-year research strategy. This investment turned the Baby Hearts vision into a permanent Academic Department, ensuring that our researchers have the stability and resources to support heart families for years to come. It marked the beginning of a world-class era for CHD research in Northern Ireland.

The first Baby Hearts study appeal was award-winning for how it brought the mystery of CHD into living rooms across the country. The study also created a massive community of heart families and has given them a seat at the table when decisions are made about heart services in Northern Ireland.

The Next Chapter

In 2024, we co-funded Baby Hearts 2. Due to the fact the first study built such a strong bond with the families who took part, 95% of them agreed to stay involved. This means we are able to track the babies from the original study. By staying with these families as the children grow, we can see how heart health affects things like school life, memory, and physical activity. It is not just about a diagnosis at birth; it is about ensuring every child has the right environment to thrive as they grow up. CHD conditions are lifelong, so our support should be too.

Want To Read More?

Dolk, H. et al (2020).
Read Professor Dolk's Baby Hearts study here:



McCullough et al. (2019).
Read how the team connected thousands of medical records to uncover hidden patterns and protective factors for CHD:





UNISLIM NORTHERN IRELAND RAISES OVER £10,000

Unislim NI recently presented us with a donation of £10,190, which was raised through a 2-year partnership. Unislim leaders and members raised this fantastic amount through activities including a fashion show at the Balmoral Hotel, 5K walks, Jolly Jumper class events and weekly class donations. Throughout the partnership our staff also visited a number of Unislim classes to deliver health checks, offering heart health advice and helping to promote early detection and prevention. At the cheque presentation at the Europa Hotel, Belfast, made by Unislim CEO, Fiona Gratzer and Sally-Ann Lennon, Unislim Leader, Fiona praised the "commitment, generosity and community spirit" of Unislim members and leaders across Northern Ireland. Many thanks to everyone who supported our charity throughout the partnership.



ALISTAIR ORR WALKS 223 MILES

Alistair Orr took on the challenge of walking 223 miles in memory of his father, Neal Orr, during the 20th anniversary year of his passing. Alistair began his walk on the Scarva towpath and walked the whole way to Portstewart Strand. Following his father's stroke walking played a big part in his recovery. Alistair and his father would often walk along the towpath with their dog and so the location held a lot of meaning for Alistair. He was joined by family and friends along the way and raised an incredible £12,961 for his efforts. Alistair said, "I chose Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke because of the excellent work they do and did for our family during the years after Dad's stroke." Our sincere thanks go to Alistair, his family and all who supported his fundraising for this incredibly generous in memory donation.

VICTOR RAMSAY IN MEMORY EVENT

On the 24th of February 2025 Victor Ramsay sadly passed away from a sudden heart attack at the age of 65. Victor was a local businessman of Ramsay Fuels, and a well-known figure within the community. Victor's son, David Ramsay, and family held a BBQ and auction night in August in memory of Victor and to support our charity. An outstanding £12,000 was raised from the event and our heartfelt thanks go out to the Ramsay family and to all who supported the family's fundraiser in memory of Victor.



For fundraising ideas and inspiration, please visit nichs.org.uk/fundraiseforus

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Care Services



HERE FOR THE WHOLE JOURNEY

At Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke we know that adjusting to life with a chest, heart or stroke condition is about far more than physical recovery. Emotional wellbeing, confidence, resilience and family life all play vital roles in recovery and long-term adjustment. That is why our Care team continue to develop and expand services that support people and families at every stage of their journey.

Our Care Services are built around a whole person approach, supporting individuals from diagnosis through recovery and beyond. Through our Family Support service, rehabilitation programmes and wellbeing services our Care team work alongside individuals and their families to reduce isolation, improve confidence and help people regain a sense of control.

A key new development within our care offering is ACTivate Your Life, an evidence based psychoeducational wellbeing programme rooted in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. ACTivate Your Life is designed to help people better understand how their mind works, respond more helpfully to difficult thoughts and feelings, build mindfulness skills and take positive action aligned with what matters most to them.

Delivered face-to-face over six structured sessions the programme supports people to develop practical tools for managing stress, anxiety and low mood while increasing confidence and psychological resilience. ACTivate Your Life is a non-clinical intervention making it suitable for wide community delivery and accessible to people adjusting to life with long-term conditions.



ACTivate Your Life strengthens our care offer by complementing our existing Family Support, rehabilitation and wellness services. It provides early emotional support that can help people feel more in control, better equipped to cope with challenges and more confident in managing their health and wellbeing. We are delighted to be launching this new programme in early Spring.



In addition to ACTivate Your Life, we continue to take a whole family approach to care. We are proud to work in partnership with Rosie's Trust, recognising the important role pets play in emotional wellbeing, routine and recovery. Rosie's Trust is the only charity in Northern Ireland dedicated to helping cancer patients, people receiving end of life care and older people with mobility issues to keep their companion pets by their side. Through this collaboration, our Care Services Coordinators can refer eligible NICHS clients for practical pet support including dog walking, feeding, grooming and vet visits.

A six-month pilot programme is currently underway in the South Eastern Trust area, extending Rosie's Trust eligibility to adults living with mobility issues which are a result of a chest, heart or stroke condition. By reducing one more worry at an already difficult time this partnership allows people to focus on recovery with greater peace of mind.

SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Our Care Services continue to evolve in response to what people and families tell us they need most. Alongside the introduction of ACTivate Your Life we are pleased to share a positive update on our online Caregivers Video Programme which is now live.

Caregivers play a vital role in supporting loved ones living with chest, heart and stroke conditions yet many report feeling overwhelmed, isolated or unsure where to turn for help. In response, we developed a series of online support videos to provide practical guidance, reassurance and trusted information in a flexible, accessible format.

The Caregivers Video Programme forms part of our referral pathway and the videos are available online allowing caregivers to access support at a time and pace that suits them. Since we launched the programme last autumn, the videos have already been accessed over one hundred times on YouTube which demonstrates the clear demand for this type of accessible support.

The videos feature a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals including Stroke, Cardiac and Respiratory Specialist Nurses, a Physiotherapist, Speech and Language Therapist, and Pharmacist. Topics include managing symptoms, communication challenges, medication, physical activity, emotional wellbeing and self-care. Importantly, caregivers themselves also feature in the videos sharing their experiences, advice and encouragement for others at the start of their caring journey.



Together, ACTivate Your Life, our online Caregivers Video Programme, and partnerships such as that with Rosie's Trust represent a significant step forward in our commitment to supporting emotional wellbeing, resilience and confidence for people affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions, and for those who care for them, every step of the way.

To find out more about our range of care and support services, please visit nichs.org.uk/support

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Corporate Supporters



MACKLE PET FOODS

We would like to thank Mackle Pet Foods for choosing us as their 2025 charity partner and raising an incredible £30,871 for our work.

Mackle Pet Foods employees took to the skies and clocked up the miles as part of their fundraising efforts. Eleven brave members of staff completed a thrilling skydive, the company's two sites went head-to-head in a static cycle race and the teams got into the festive spirit by hosting a Jolly Jumper Day in support of our services. We would also like to thank the Mackle family for their generous personal donation.

Mackle Pet Foods is a great example of a partner who gets involved in everything we have to offer as they also signed up for our Work Well Live Well workplace health and wellbeing support programme, which is delivered by NICHS and funded by the Public Health Agency.



DECORA BLINDS

Decora Blinds is a long-term supporter of our charity, having worked with us since 2009 and raising a fabulous £10,946 to date. The team at Decora support us through in memory donations, in-house fundraising events, marathon runs and football matches. We thank Decora Blinds for their valued, continued support.



GMcG CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

With a passion for supporting charities, GMcG Chartered Accountants give their employees the opportunity to choose the company's charity partner each year. We were grateful to be the nominated charity for 2025 and to support the GMcG team with their many fundraising activities.

Employees laced up their running shoes and completed the Belfast City Marathon relay, then ditched their desks for hiking poles and braved the wind and rain to climb Slieve Meelmore on our Twilight Hearty Hike. GMcG's eight Directors also conquered the flames at our very first Fright Night Firewalk Challenge at Halloween. All GMcG's achievements have culminated in an amazing £16,000 being raised for our charity. A big thank you to everyone who got involved throughout the partnership.



FARRANS CONSTRUCTION LTD

We would like to congratulate and thank Farrans Construction LTD on their amazing achievement of raising over £20,000 for our work in 2025. The team at Farrans took on the Belfast City Marathon relay, raising £15,662. This, coupled with their kind donation from the Grand Central Station Contractors Ball, saw their fundraising milestone exceed £20,000, for which we are incredibly grateful.



FANE VALLEY

Throughout 2024 and 2025 Fane Valley kindly supported our charity, as well as The Irish Heart Foundation, through their Happy Hearts Group Charity Partnership, raising an astonishing £45,500 for each of us.

Fane Valley saw the Happy Hearts Group Charity Partnership as an important opportunity to educate their employees on the importance of heart health and building healthy habits to help prevent heart conditions and stroke.

Throughout this great partnership the company facilitated pop-up blood pressure checks for customers and employees in all their stores. Other fundraising activities included sky dives, golf days, and twenty-two of their employees taking to the floor in 'Fane Valley Does Strictly', competing for the coveted glitter ball trophy! Well done and thank you to everyone at Fane Valley.

VOLUNTEERING

Thanks to the kindness of local businesses and our corporate partners in 2025, forty-four hours of volunteering were donated to our charity. Employees from our corporate partners BCN, Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, Molson Coors, Linen Quarter BID and Barclays, alongside staff from local businesses Fin Tru and Proofpoint, all helped us to raise vital funds for our charity through kindly volunteering their time to support various events. From packing reindeer food sachets, clocking up the miles at our Grand Central Station static cycle, volunteering at our Tesco World Stroke Day collections and helping at our Christmas Quiz, we could not have achieved as much without these wonderful volunteers- thank you!



If you are a local business, or an employee, and are interested in finding out more about our volunteer opportunities, please contact the team at corporate@nichs.org.uk

Health

WELLBEING TIPS FOR BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

In addition to leading a healthy lifestyle and knowing your numbers, it is also important to look after your mental health and overall wellbeing to keep your heart, mind and body well. Making personal lifestyle changes and breaking old habits however can be a struggle for many of us. Lots of external factors can also influence our lifestyle choices and behaviours often making us feel powerless to change our habits. Every small change to your lifestyle however can make a difference to your health and wellbeing and below we share some tips on how you can successfully make changes.

Set Yourself S.M.A.R.T Goals!

Think about what you want to change and set yourself achievable goals, seeking out support from your family and friends if needed. Setting goals can help keep us focused and motivated. You should also break down your goal into S.M.A.R.T actions, to ensure each action is **specific, measurable, achievable, realistic** and **time bound**. For example, if your goal is to eat more healthily your actions could be to eat an apple a day, cook homemade food twice a week to start off with, or to reduce salt intake every day.



Struggling to create your goals?

- Try thinking about what you hope to gain/achieve and what that means to you.
- Consider what will be different for you if you achieve your goal.
- What will help you in achieving your goal or making a change? Does it involve the support of family/friends etc?

Consider A Solution Focused Approach

This approach encourages you to stay positive and have a positive mindset about the change you are making, focus on your strengths and create solutions. It is about taking small achievable steps that can help move you forward. Using this approach can also be beneficial when setting your S.M.A.R.T goals!

- Put key focus on strengths and positives.
- Look at what is working well for you now even if it is just a little bit.
- Allow yourself some treats and rewards for achieving your actions and overall goal.

Practice Gratitude

Being grateful for what we have is so important, hopefully we can all find positives in our lives. Think deeply and mindfully about the things you are grateful for. If you can, list in order those things for which you are extremely grateful or practice by writing yourself a gratitude letter. This can be a useful tool when starting behaviour change by evoking positive emotions and feelings, which leads to a more motivated and determined mindset.



Well You

We offer a personal Well You behaviour change programme for individuals that are ready to make lifestyle changes and are at a higher risk of developing chest, heart and stroke conditions.

Below is an example of how Well You has successfully helped an individual with healthier lifestyle changes.

A Well You client wanted to reduce their weight through a healthier diet and more physical activity. On day one their blood pressure reading was borderline high. Following completion of the first six weeks of Well You the client successfully lost weight through a healthier lifestyle and behaviour changes. The client's blood pressure was also reduced as a result of this.

The client told our team they felt empowered to make changes and were able to pre-empt potential barriers before they happened and had already addressed and planned for these in the Well You sessions. The client also told us her motivation was renewed each week after her Well You session.

We are delighted to share that 100% of clients who completed their initial six weeks of Well You rated the programme 5 out of 5 stars and would definitely recommend the course to others.

To find out more about Well You, please visit nichs.org.uk/wellyou

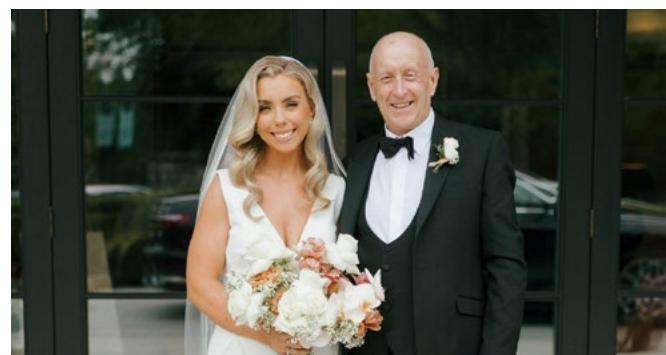
Supporters

MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON YOUR SPECIAL DAY



A small gesture can make a huge difference and even when celebrating your big day, you can help people across Northern Ireland living with chest, heart and stroke conditions with our special wedding favours. Sophie Barr kindly did just that and says;

"When planning our wedding we wanted our day to reflect what really matters to us - love, gratitude, and family. Instead of traditional wedding favours we chose to support Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke, a charity that is deeply personal to both our families."



"We have both seen firsthand the impact that heart disease and stroke can have on loved ones, both through support during the loss of dear family members, and support with recovery from stroke. My Dad attended and is now volunteering at a NICHS Post Rehab Exercise Programme group since he had his first stroke in 2020. The support and services provided by NICHS are invaluable, and with our donation we hope that many more families benefit from the incredible support network provided by the charity."

To find out more about our wedding favours, please visit nichs.org.uk/weddings

Healthy Recipes

HEART-HEALTHY LUNCHBOX IDEAS

A new year brings new routines, and it's the perfect time to give your family's lunchboxes a healthy refresh. A little planning can make a big difference to your family's heart health.

Taking just 10 minutes each weekend to plan your weekly lunches helps you stay organised, create a focused shopping list and avoid unnecessary spending. It also reduces food waste and makes it easier to include the nutritious foods that support a healthy heart.

At NICHS, we encourage families to build lunchboxes around wholegrains, lean proteins, fruit, vegetables and dairy.



These foods help keep energy levels steady through the school or work day and support heart health in the long term.

Why not get the children involved? Let them choose a fruit or vegetable for their lunchbox each week. When children help prepare their lunches, they are more likely to enjoy them and build lifelong healthy eating habits.

Lunch Ideas

Simple Wholemeal Roll Lunches

These are quick, cheap and perfect for busy mornings:

- Tuna, lettuce and a spoon of light mayo
- Egg salad (1-2 boiled eggs mashed with light mayo) and lettuce
- Hummus, grated cheese and lettuce
- Low-fat cheese slice with tomato and cucumber
- Leftover roast chicken with mixed salad and yoghurt dressing

Pair with a piece of fruit, a yoghurt and a bottle of water or semi-skimmed milk.

Spicy Chicken and Salad Wrap

Spread low-fat Greek-style yoghurt mixed with curry and chili powder on a wholemeal wrap, add chopped cooked chicken, shredded lettuce, chopped cucumber and pepper. Roll up, slice in half, and pack with a fruit yoghurt and a piece of fruit. Simple, colourful and heart-smart! A spicy, crunchy wrap that is perfect for using up leftover roast chicken!

Don't Forget The Drink!

It is the secret weapon for staying sharp and hydrated! Go for water or semi-skimmed milk to keep things cool and healthy. Fruit juice? Sure, but keep it to 150ml max—those sneaky sugars add up! Want flavour? Add fresh fruit to water or use sugar-free squash for a fun twist.

Small changes add up. With a little planning, lunchtimes can be nutritious, budget-friendly and enjoyable for the whole family, as well as support a healthier heart in 2026.

Other Recipes To Try

Veggie Pesto Pasta Pot

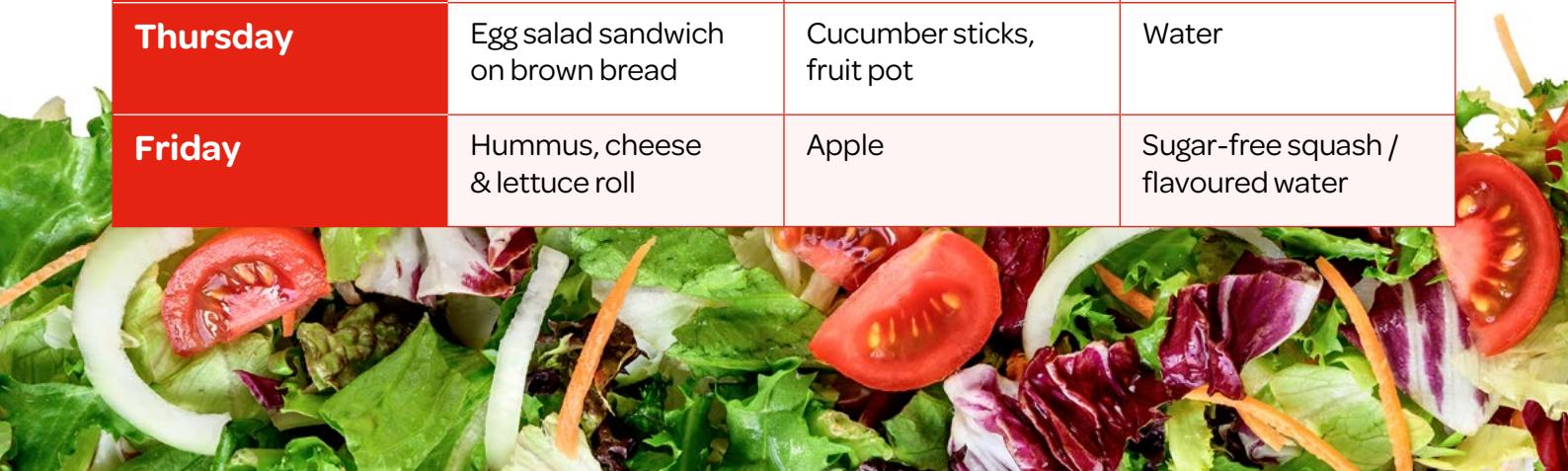
Mix wholegrain pasta with peas, cherry tomatoes, sweetcorn, and a teaspoon of green pesto. Add chunks of cooked chicken or mozzarella. Serve cold.

Quick Bean & Cheese Quesadilla

Spread mashed kidney or butter beans onto a wholemeal tortilla, sprinkle with cheese and fold. Toast lightly and cut into triangles. Great warm or cold.

For more ideas and tips, visit nutrition.org.uk/creating-a-healthy-diet

Day	Main Lunch	Sides	Drink
Monday	Tuna, lettuce & light mayo in a wholemeal roll	Carrot sticks, low-fat yoghurt	Water
Tuesday	Veggie pesto pasta pot	Grapes	Semi-skimmed milk
Wednesday	Spicy chicken & salad wrap	Orange, yoghurt	Water
Thursday	Egg salad sandwich on brown bread	Cucumber sticks, fruit pot	Water
Friday	Hummus, cheese & lettuce roll	Apple	Sugar-free squash / flavoured water



Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

Give a regular donation – make a lasting impact

Help us to be here **supporting local people and families living with life-changing illnesses** – today, tomorrow and for years to come.



Visit www.nichs.org.uk/regulardonation

Find out More

Charity Reg No. NIC103593



Challenge Events

Take on a challenge in 2026 and help fund vital local services for people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions across Northern Ireland. Whether you love a fun run, a thrilling descent, or a mountain hike, there are so many inspiring ways you can get involved.

For more information on any of these events, please contact the team at events@nichs.org.uk



BELFAST EUROPA ABSEIL - 7TH JUNE 2026

Ready to step outside your comfort zone? Take on the ultimate adrenaline challenge and abseil down one of Belfast's most iconic buildings. This unforgettable experience combines excitement with purpose, giving you the chance to support vital services while enjoying incredible city views. Whether you are a thrill-seeker or simply want to try something new for a great cause, this challenge promises memories that will last a lifetime.



RED DRESS FUN RUN – 22ND MARCH 2026

Join our flagship event at Stormont Estate, dress in red and run, walk or wheel the 5K route and help raise awareness and funds for your local health charity. Designed to be fully inclusive, this feel-good event welcomes all ages and abilities. Bring your family, friends, colleagues, and dogs too! Enjoy a fun-filled morning of community spirit while making a real difference for those living with life changing conditions. A huge thank you to our headline supporters, MACE and Musgrave MarketPlace, for helping make this event possible. Join us and make 2026 our biggest year yet!



80TH ANNIVERSARY MIGHTY MOURNES CHALLENGE 12TH SEPTEMBER 2026

Pick your peak and push your limits with our brand-new hiking event. Choose between conquering Slieve Donard or tackling three peaks in one day - Slieve Donard, Slieve Commedagh and Slievenaglogh. Whether you are a first-time hiker or a seasoned adventurer, this is your chance to challenge yourself while supporting people affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions.

TAKING ON A PERSONAL CHALLENGE IN 2026?

From marathons to walks and fitness events, you can support us wherever your challenge takes you. Be it the New York marathon or the Antrim Coast half marathon, and anything in between, we will provide you with support and plenty of encouragement so you can make a big impact to our work!

MINIMUM UNIT PRICING

We have been continuing to lead the campaign for the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) for alcohol. Both the evidence from Scotland and the modelling for Northern Ireland show that this policy will have a positive impact.

MUP refers to the lowest price at which a unit of alcohol can be sold. MUP aims to reduce alcohol-related harm by increasing the cost of the cheapest, most readily available alcoholic beverages which would lead to lower consumption of these drinks.

We were delighted when the Health Minister, Mike Nesbitt, announced in October 2024 that he intended to bring forward legislation. Sadly, the legislation has not yet received Executive approval.

It is clear that MUP has very little impact on those who consume moderate amounts of alcohol, but it has a beneficial effect by marginally reducing consumption amongst those who are drinking amounts of alcohol that are damaging to health.

Each year in NI, approximately 7,426 hospital admissions are caused directly by alcohol consumption and an estimated 676 people die each year here as a direct result of alcohol consumption. MUP could help reduce these figures.

In an attempt to draw attention to the deadlock on legislation we organised an event to promote the benefits of MUP at Parliament Buildings in November last year. Speakers at the event included Mike Nesbitt MLA, Health Minister, Professor Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, Dr Alan Stout, Chair BMA NI, and Colin Angus, University of Sheffield.

We have continued to campaign with the other members of the Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance to see legislation introduced, however, the reality is unless a Bill is introduced very soon it is unlikely to pass through the Assembly by the end of this term in April 2027.



TOBACCO AND VAPING BILL

We support all the measures incorporated in the Tobacco and Vaping Bill currently passing through Parliament in Westminster, including the 'progressive age' measure governing, and gradually increasing, the age at which you can purchase tobacco and the requirement for retailers to have to register with their local council in order to sell vapes.

We are concerned about the increasing use of vapes, especially amongst young people. We believe there is increasing evidence about cardiac and respiratory illness being linked to vaping.

We know that in 2022, among 18–24-year-olds, almost half of current vape users (48%) used disposables as their main type, an increase from only 2.8% in 2021. The peak age group for current vape use was 18–24-year-olds (11%) and 25–34-year-olds (11%).

We believe that vapes should only be used as a short-term measure to help people to quit cigarettes rather than simply a lifestyle choice. Our message is, if you don't smoke, don't vape.

We have therefore set up a petition to increase the age of vaping to 21 to discourage the use of vapes by younger people. If you wish to sign the petition, please do so at www.change.org/p/raise-the-age-to-vape-to-21

Supporters



FUNDING HOPE - RESEARCH, CARE AND RECOVERY MADE POSSIBLE BY YOU

Every day, people across Northern Ireland are living with the impact of chest, heart and stroke conditions, conditions that can change lives in an instant. Alongside medical care, we are there to help on the road to recovery, with research, care and prevention at the heart of our mission.

Everything we do, from delivering services to funding research, is made possible by our community of supporters who believe in a healthier future. Regular donations and gifts left in wills provide the foundation that enables our work to continue, grow and reach those who need it most. These gifts don't just help with the daily challenges; they help us plan for tomorrow, funding life-changing research, sustaining vital care services and ensuring that support is there not only today, but for future generations.

We fund local research into chest, heart and stroke conditions, such as the Baby Hearts Study. In 2013, supporter donations, alongside support from the Children's Heartbeat Trust, enabled a £253,801 investment to investigate the factors that might play a role in babies being born with congenital heart disease. A decade later, follow-on funding is helping researchers to further study long-term impacts and improve support for affected children and families.

Alongside research, our care services provide vital support to people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions. This year alone, we supported 2,807 people through our services, delivering a total of 4,936 support activities.

Our flagship Family Support Service is the gateway to our care. By listening, guiding and encouraging, the team helps people rebuild their lives, offering tailored practical and emotional support; from rehabilitation exercise and self-management courses to wellness sessions and signposting to other local services.

Regular gifts and gifts in wills support local survivors on their recovery journey and help fund vital research, care and prevention work. We are deeply grateful to those who give in this way, as their generosity helps ensure our work can continue.

If you would like to set up a regular gift you can do this through our website at nichs.org.uk/regulardonation

For more information on leaving a gift in your will to support our work, please visit nichs.org.uk/giftsinwills

If you would prefer to speak to a member of the team about gifts in wills or a regular donation, please call us for a chat on 028 9026 6743 and we will be happy to help you.



RESPIRATORY HALL OF HOPE

Being diagnosed with a respiratory condition can be devastating, not just for the person affected but for their family members as well. Life goes on but without the necessary information, skills or confidence it can be hard for people to manage their condition. It can be difficult to make well-informed decisions about health, treatment or even daily life - let alone make plans for the future. People living with respiratory conditions need information, care and support from others.

We are pleased to unveil our first respiratory Hall of Hope which has been created for Antrim Area Hospital. Following the same style as our stroke ward Halls of Hope which are in hospitals across Northern Ireland, the artwork features some of our clients who are living with a respiratory condition, who have gone through our services and want to give words of encouragement to anyone currently in hospital.

The Hall of Hope clearly lays out the respiratory services we can provide in a visual form with easy access to our leaflets and information booklets. This ensures that hospital patients and their family members have access to timely support information to help them make informed choices about their health, as well as information about the further help available from our charity that they can access post their discharge from hospital.

The Hall of Hope features quotes from NICHS service users Billy, Helen, Maggie, and Mary, who are kindly willing to share how our charity has helped them adapt to life with a respiratory condition. We have plans to replicate this Hall of Hope in other respiratory wards across Northern Ireland.

NICHS Family Room

We were also delighted to officially open our Family Room in the stroke ward at Craigavon Area Hospital recently. We have created a cosy family room full of support and information so relatives can feel they are informed, reassured and not alone during a difficult time visiting loved ones on the ward.

A huge thank you to our corporate partner Coffology who have donated a state-of-the-art coffee machine for the family room. Patients, family members and hospital staff are able to enjoy free coffee, courtesy of us, whilst having some quiet time in the room.



Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Almost 90% of our income
comes from public donations.

**Find out how you can support NICHS
at www.nichs.org.uk**



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