



A Healthier You

7 steps to improved health and wellbeing

Chest
Heart &
Stroke



Contents

Risk Factors	05
Atrial Fibrillation	07
Blood Pressure	08
Cholesterol	10
Blood Sugar	12
Seven Steps To Wellbeing -	14
1. Weight Management	14
2. Eat A Balanced Diet	16
3. Keep Physically Active	24
4. Stop Smoking	26
5. Moderate Your Alcohol Intake	28
6. Manage Your Stress Levels	30
7. Sleep Well	32
Preventing Heart Disease And Stroke	34

Healthy changes start with little changes. Whether you want to lose weight, get active or quit smoking, we know how difficult it is to change behaviour and that external factors outside our control can influence the choices we make.

This booklet provides lots of information and healthy tips to help you make that healthier choice which in return will help keep you well for longer and prevent avoidable chest, heart and stroke conditions such as:

- **Heart Attack**

A heart attack happens when there is a blockage in an artery supplying the heart, so the heart muscle itself no longer gets blood. Oxygen can no longer reach this part of the heart which affects its ability to work properly.

- **Stroke**

A stroke is like a heart attack but this time the blocked artery means oxygen can't get to part of the brain. It can also be caused by a burst artery which causes damage to the brain.

- **COPD**

COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) is an umbrella term for a group of lung conditions that cause permanent damage to a person's airways. In the majority of cases, smoking is the cause, however, occupational or environmental factors, such as dust or chemicals, and some inherited problems can also cause COPD.

The information within this booklet will help you understand the factors you can control to increase your chances of being healthy and avoiding chest, heart and stroke related illnesses.

For more information about the symptoms of a heart attack or stroke and what action to take, go to:

www.nichs.org.uk/heartconditions

www.nichs.org.uk/stroke

Risk Factors

Risk factors are conditions or habits that increase the likelihood of developing poor health or a disease such as a chest, heart or stroke illness. There are both modifiable risk factors which can be changed and non-modifiable risk factors which cannot be changed.

Non-modifiable risk factors include:

- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Personal History**
- **Family History**
- **Other health conditions**
e.g. diabetes

Modifiable risk factors include:

- **Nutrition**
- **Physical Activity**
- **Alcohol**
- **Smoking**
- **Stress**
- **Sleep**

Non-Modifiable Risk Factors – Things We Can't Change

- **Age** – the risk of a heart attack or a stroke increases with age.
- **Gender** – the risk of a heart attack or a stroke increases with age for both men and women.
- **Ethnicity** – people with an Afro-Caribbean or South-East Asian background have an increased risk of heart attack and stroke.
- **Personal History** – if you have already had a stroke or mini-stroke (TIA), a heart attack or angina you have a greater chance of having another stroke or heart attack.
- **Family History** – if your siblings or parents had a heart attack or stroke at an early age (under 55 for men and under 65 for women) your own risk will be higher.
- **Other health conditions** e.g. diabetes, sleep apnoea, or atrial fibrillation (AF), a heart rhythm disturbance which can develop at any age, your risk of having a stroke is greatly increased.

If you are concerned about any of these risk factors, please speak to your GP and have regular health checks.

Do You Know Your ABC?

- A** - Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat)
- B** - Blood pressure
- C** - Cholesterol

All of these can be related to your risk of cardiovascular health, so it is important to get them tested.

There are a number of risk factors that contribute to atrial fibrillation, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. But there are lifestyle changes you can make which can improve your overall health and wellbeing and reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Know Your ABC's

Get Them Checked!
For more information go to www.nichs.org.uk/wellcheck



Atrial Fibrillation (AF)



What is AF?

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) is a type of irregular heartbeat. If you have AF, your heart will not have a regular beat and may be abnormally fast. The heart may not empty its chambers of blood at each beat and a clot can form in blood left behind, which can then travel to the brain and cause a stroke.

What Are The Health Risks Linked To AF?

AF can make your risk of stroke five times higher, if untreated.

- Increased risk of heart failure
- Almost double the death rate from stroke
- Increased disability from stroke
- Longer stay in hospital
- Increased risk of a stroke happening again

Signs And Symptoms Of AF

Sometimes people with AF have no symptoms, others may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Palpitations or fluttering or “thumping” in the chest
- Feeling faint at times
- Being breathless
- Feeling very tired

What Can I Do?

Not all cases of AF can be prevented, but to reduce your risk you can make changes to your lifestyle:



1. Moderate Your Alcohol Intake



2. Eat A Balanced Diet



3. Keep Physically Active



4. Maintain A Healthy Weight



5. Manage Your Stress Levels



6. Stop Smoking



7. Get Enough Sleep

How To Detect AF?

If you think you have AF, or if it has been detected in your NICHs health check urgently contact your GP. To book an NICHs health check visit www.nichs.org.uk/wellcheck

Blood Pressure



What Is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force within your arteries when your heart pumps blood around your body.

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can damage blood vessels if it remains consistently high, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Systolic blood pressure: is the top number and is the force at which your heart pumps blood around the body.

Diastolic blood pressure: is the bottom number and is the pressure when your heart rests between beats.

Signs And Symptoms Of High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure has no symptoms, so it is important to get your blood pressure checked every 5 years, or more regularly.

What Are The Health Risks Linked To High Blood Pressure?

If your blood pressure is consistently higher than 140/90mmHg:

- It puts extra strain on your blood vessels, heart and other organs, such as the brain, kidneys and eyes.
- It increases your risk of heart disease, heart attack and stroke, as well as kidney disease and vascular dementia.

What Can I Do?

In addition to taking your medication, you can make changes to your lifestyle:

- **Losing weight**
.....
- **Reducing your salt intake**
.....
- **Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink**
.....
- **Taking regular exercise and being more active**
.....
- **Increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables you eat**



High Salt Foods

Reducing your salt intake can help you to manage your blood pressure. Avoiding foods high in salt can help.

Foods Almost Always High In Salt

- Anchovies
- Bacon
- Cheese
- Gravy granules
- Ham
- Olives
- Pickles
- Prawns
- Salami
- Salted and dry-roasted nuts
- Salt fish
- Smoked meat and fish
- Soy sauce
- Stock cubes
- Yeast extract

Foods That Can Be High In Salt

- Bread products such as crumpets, bagels and ciabatta
- Pasta sauces
- Crisps
- Pizza
- Ready meals
- Soup
- Sandwiches
- Sausages
- Tomato ketchup, mayonnaise and other sauces
- Breakfast cereals

Remember, always check food labels for salt content.

See the Cutting Down on Salt section on page 20 for more information.

As a general guide:

- Ideal blood pressure is considered to be between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg
- High blood pressure is considered to be 140/90mmHg or higher
- Low blood pressure is considered to be 90/60mmHg or lower

Cholesterol

What Is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a natural fatty substance found in your blood and it is essential for healthy functioning of the body. Cholesterol is made in the liver, but we also get cholesterol from the food we eat.

Too much cholesterol in the body can cause fatty deposits to build up in the arteries, increasing your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Cholesterol is carried in your blood by proteins which are known as lipoproteins when they combine. There are two main types of cholesterol or lipoproteins:

- **'Good' cholesterol or High Density Lipoproteins (HDL)** that takes fat away from your artery walls
- **'Bad' cholesterol or Low Density Lipoproteins (LDL)** sticks to your artery walls and causes a fatty build up.

Familial Hypercholesterolaemia (FH)

FH is inherited from our families and can lead to extremely high cholesterol levels. Without treatment, FH can lead to heart disease at a young age.

Signs And Symptoms Of High Cholesterol

High cholesterol has **no symptoms**, so it is important to get your cholesterol checked regularly.



What Can I Do?

Making changes to your lifestyle will help reduce your cholesterol. It is also important to take any medication prescribed by your doctor.

1. Eat A Balanced Diet



2. Maintain A Healthy Weight



3. Keep Physically Active



4. Moderate Your Alcohol Intake



5. Stop Smoking



Foods To Reduce Cholesterol

Foods To Eat

- Oily fish-such as salmon, mackerel and sardines (tuna is no longer counted as an oily fish)
- Avocados
- Nuts (unsalted) and seeds
- Sunflower, rapeseed and olive oil
- Porridge
- Oatbran
- Oat breakfast cereals
- Foods high in fibre such as wholegrain rice, bread and pasta
- Fruit and vegetables
- Baked beans
- Mixed beans
- Chickpeas
- Soya milk or soya yoghurt

There is no need to buy special cholesterol reducing food products

Foods To Avoid

- Foods containing saturated fats: fatty cuts of meat and meat products e.g. sausages, bacon and meat pies
- Butter and lard
- Cream, soured cream, full fat crème fraîche and ice cream
- Cheese, particularly hard cheese
- Biscuits and cakes
- Pastry and pastry products e.g. croissants, sausage rolls and pies
- Milk chocolate
- Coconut oil, coconut cream and palm oil
- Foods containing trans fats (listed as hydrogenated oils or hydrogenated fats)
- Fast foods and fried foods

As A General Guide:

- Total cholesterol should be below 5.0 mmol/L
- HDL should be above 1.0 mmol/L for men and above 1.2 mmol/L for women
- LDL should be below 3.0 mmol/L
- Triglycerides should be below 1.5 mmol/L
- Total cholesterol/HDL ratio should be below 4.5 mmol/L

Blood Sugar

What is blood sugar?

Blood sugar can also be known as blood glucose. Glucose is a sugar which comes from the food and drink we consume and is used as energy. Any that isn't used straight away will be stored in cells for later when the body needs energy.

What Are Blood Sugar Levels?

Blood sugar levels are a measurement of how much glucose is in your blood. They can change, going up and down throughout the day, before and after we eat.

Some food and drinks will provide the body with higher amounts of glucose than others. The foods that cause the greatest rise in blood sugar levels are those high in processed carbohydrates. These include cakes, sugary drinks, white bread, white pasta and rice, and biscuits.

Fibre is one component of carbohydrates that isn't converted into sugar. High fibre carbohydrates such as whole-wheat pasta and brown rice slowly release energy, reducing spikes in blood sugar levels after meals and keep us feeling full for longer.

What Happens To Blood Sugar When We Eat?

The body constantly works to maintain a healthy blood sugar level. If it is too high or too low, it can impact our health.

The body's pancreas releases insulin to lower blood sugar (e.g. after eating) and glucagon to raise blood sugar when needed (e.g. during exercise when you need more energy).

What Are Normal Blood Sugar Levels?

Blood sugar is measured in millimoles per litre (mmol/L). The table shows normal blood sugar levels before and after eating:

	Before meals	At least 90 minutes after meals
Non-diabetic	4.0 – 5.9 mmol/L	Under 7.8 mmol/L
Type 1 diabetes	4 – 7 mmol/L	5 – 9 mmol/L
Type 2 diabetes	4 – 7 mmol/L	Under 8.5 mmol/L

What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a lifelong condition which causes a person's blood sugar level to become too high.

Type 1 diabetes - the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin.

Type 2 diabetes - the body does not produce enough insulin, or the body does not respond properly to the insulin that is being produced.

During pregnancy, some women have high levels of blood sugar and their body is unable to produce enough insulin to absorb it all. This is called gestational diabetes.

Signs And Symptoms Of Diabetes

- Feeling very thirsty
- Going to the toilet more than usual, especially at night
- Feeling very tired
- Genital itching or thrush
- Blurred eyesight
- Cuts and wounds taking longer to heal
- Losing weight without trying to

Diabetes can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Unfortunately Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented; however, you can reduce your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

How Can I Prevent Type 2 Diabetes?

In addition to support and advice from your GP you can reduce your risk by making changes to your lifestyle.

1. Eat A Balanced Diet



2. Maintain A Healthy Weight



3. Keep Physically Active



4. Moderate Your Alcohol Intake



Seven Steps To Wellbeing

-  **1. Maintain a Healthy Weight**
-  **2. Eat a Balanced Diet**
-  **3. Keep Physically Active**
-  **4. Stop Smoking**
-  **5. Moderate Your Alcohol Intake**
-  **6. Manage Your Stress Levels**
-  **7. Get Enough Sleep**

Step 1 - Weight Management



It is important to maintain a healthy weight and being either overweight or underweight can lead to health problems.

Being overweight can lead to an increase in your blood pressure and cholesterol, increasing your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Being underweight can cause irregular heartbeats as well as affecting your heart muscle which can cause heart failure.

Tips To Help You Lose Weight

When trying to lose weight it is important to do it safely. Aim to lose weight at around 0.5kg to 1kg (1lb to 2lb) per week until you achieve a healthy weight.

When considering our calorie intake, the figures below demonstrate how many an average adult and child should consume:



2000 kcal per day



2500 kcal per day



1400-1900 kcal per day



1500-2000 kcal per day

Goal Setting

Goal setting can help you make lasting lifestyle changes to improve your health. Break your goal into smaller actions that will help you stick to your plan.

Here are some examples to help:

1. Don't skip breakfast
2. Eat regular meals
3. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
4. Get more active
5. Drink plenty of water
6. Eat high-fibre foods
7. Read food labels
8. Use a smaller plate
9. Don't ban foods
10. Don't stock junk food
11. Cut down on alcohol
12. Plan your meals

Most importantly you should look to eat a **balanced diet**.

A way to do that is by following the **Eatwell Guide**.

Make Your Goals Smart

S

PECIFIC

Plans effectively with targets in mind.



M

EASURABLE

Track your progress and reevaluate along the way.



A

TTAINABLE

Set realistic goals that are challenging but achievable.



R

ELEVANT

Ensure the goal serves a relevant purpose.



T

IME

Specific a deadline, monitor progress and reevaluate.



Step 2 - Eat A Balanced Diet

A healthy diet is about having a balanced diet so your body gets all the nutrients it needs, as well as maintaining a healthy weight, blood pressure and cholesterol level.

The **EATWELL** guide shows us which food groups to eat and in what amount, in order to achieve a healthy and balanced diet. Portions can be measured with your hand or everyday objects.

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving contains

Energy 1046kJ 250kcal	Fat 5g	Saturates 1.3g	Sugars 34g	Salt 0.9g
	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
12.5%	7%	6.5%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake.

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ / 167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars



Eat less often and in small amounts

Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.



Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day

Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish every week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat

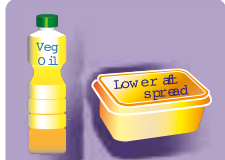
Note: The Eatwell Guide shows the proportions of a healthy diet over the course of the week. It does not have to be split as shown for every meal or even every day.



6-8 a day

Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and / or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day



Oil & spreads

Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts

Per day:

♀ 2000Kcal ♂ 2500Kcal

= ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

Eat A Balanced Diet - Portion Sizes

Group	Portions Per Day	Food
Fruit And Vegetables	5+ portions	Fresh fruit Vegetables Fruit juice
Potatoes, Bread, Rice, Pasta And Other Starchy Carbohydrates	3-4 portions	Dried rice or pasta Cooked rice or pasta Flaked breakfast cereals Dried porridge oats Baked potato Plain popcorn
Beans, Pulses, Fish, Eggs, Meat And Other Proteins	2-3 portions	Grilled chicken Cooked fish fillet Cooked steak Cooked beans, chickpeas or lentils Canned tuna in water Hummus Nuts and seeds
Dairy And Alternatives	2-3 portions	Low fat yoghurt Cheddar cheese Milk or plant-based alternative
Oils And Spreads	Small amounts	Unsaturated oils or spread

1 Portion

Weight

Tips On How To Achieve The Correct Portion

One handful or more	80g	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fruit and vegetables provide vitamins and minerals• They give us energy which is slowly released• We shouldn't drink more than 1 juice or smoothie as they are high in sugar• Aim for 3 vegetables and 2 pieces of fruit
3 serving spoons or more	80g	
1 small glass	150ml	
2 handfuls	65-75g	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose wholegrain varieties. These are high in fibre which help lower cholesterol and keep us fuller for longer• They contain carbohydrates which give us energy
2 hands cupped together	180g	
3 handfuls	40g	
1 and a half handfuls	40g	
Size of your fist	220g	
3 handfuls	20g	
Half the size of your hand	120g	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides protein to build and repair muscles• Beans and pulses are good, healthy alternatives to meat and are low in fat• Non-meat alternatives include tofu and Quorn• Aim for two portions of sustainable fish a week, one of which should be oily such as salmon, mackerel or sardines• Choose leaner cuts of meat and limit red and processed meat to 70g per day
Half the size of your hand	100-140g	
Half the size of your hand	130g	
6 tablespoons	120g	
One can	120g	
2 tablespoons	55g	
Palm of your hand	20g	
4 tablespoons or one pot	120g	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source of calcium, vitamins, minerals and protein• When buying alternatives, choose unsweetened, calcium fortified versions
Size of 2 thumbs together	30g	
1 medium glass	200ml	
1 teaspoon	3-5g	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unsaturated fats include olive oil, rapeseed oil or sunflower oil

Cutting Down On Salt

Our bodies need a small amount of salt to survive, but the amount that we are eating is far more than what is required.



A diet high in salt can cause raised blood pressure leading to an increased risk of a heart attack and stroke.

Salt or Sodium?

You may see on some food labels that they only state the sodium content.

To convert sodium to salt, follow the equation:

$$\text{Sodium Amount} \times 2.5 = \text{Salt Content}$$

E.g. 1g sodium \times 2.5 = 2.5g of salt

Adults should eat no more than 2.4g of sodium per day, which equates to 6g of salt.

Adults should have no more than 6g per day (1 teaspoon)
Children should have no more than 5g per day

Reducing Salt Intake



Healthy Eating On A Budget

Saving money on our food shop and eating well for less money is possible and can make a real difference to your health. Read our tips below and visit the NHS website below for some healthy meal ideas.

<https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/>

Tips On How To Eat Well For Less



Don't get lost in the offers or voucher haze, you may buy more than you actually need, and this could lead to food waste.



Write a shopping list. This helps to ensure that you only buy what you need and reduces the temptation to impulse buy unhealthy foods which are on offer.



Cook with vegetables and pulses. Meat and fish are often the most expensive ingredients. Use pulses such as beans, peas and lentils as they are a cheaper source of protein and are high in nutrients.



Not all meat is expensive and there are cheaper cuts. Ask your local supermarket or butcher what these are. Trim off fat.



Buy un-branded products as it can save you money and can sometimes be healthier—but always make sure to read the labels.



Homemade food is cheaper. Reducing the number of takeaways you buy could save you up to £800 a year.



Freeze any leftovers such as bread and extra portions. Frozen foods such as fruit and vegetables taste good, are just as nutritious, and are cheaper than fresh counterparts.



Waste nothing! It has been found that we can throw away up to £60 of good food every month. By planning meals, you can ensure that you use up all ingredients and waste nothing. Keep leftovers for lunches to save time and money and avoid the temptation to buy junk food at lunchtime.

Food Labelling

Reading food labels can help us to make a healthier food choice. Some food labels use the red, amber and green traffic light system. This makes it very easy to choose a food lower in saturated fat, total fat, salt and sugar.

- **Red means** – high so try and stay away from these as much as possible.
- **Amber means** – they contain a medium level and can be eaten now and again.
- **Green means** – low so try and choose more of these.

Some foods don't use the traffic light system, so it is important to understand what high, medium and low levels for total fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar are. You can use the guide below to make healthy food choices.

	LOW PER 100G	MEDIUM PER 100G	HIGH PER 100G	HIGH PER PORTION
Total Fat	<3g	3g - 17.5g	>17.5g	>21g
Saturated Fat	<1.5g	1.5g - 5g	>5g	>6g
Sugar	<5g	5g - 22.5g	>22.5g	>27g
Salt	<0.3g	0.3g - 1.5g	>1.5g	>1.8g

Food Labelling Terms

Health claims such as ‘helps maintains a healthy heart’ can only be made when they are based on scientific research.

Light or lite foods must be at least 30% lower in at least one typical value than standard products.

Low in fat claims may only be made where the products contain no more than 3g of fat per 100g of fat for solids or 1.5g of fat per 100ml for liquid.

How To Read Food Labels

Food labelling can be shown as per portion or per 100g. The example below shows per portion i.e. grilled burger (94g) is one portion.

If you are comparing one brand or food type with another, you need to look at the figures per 100g to make sure you are comparing like with like.

Remember!

When you look at ‘per portion’ information, this may not be the same size as the amount that you will actually eat.

Each grilled burger (94g) contains

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
924kj 220kcal	13g	5.9g	0.8g	0.7g
11%	19%	30%	<1%	12%

of an adult’s reference intake
Typical values (as sold) per 100g:
energy 966kj/230kcal

The figures in grams are the actual amounts of that nutrient in the portion or 100g. The colour coding shows whether this amount is considered to be low, medium or high.

The white label shows the total amount of calories in the food product and is shown either as ‘kj’ or ‘kcal’.

The % values are referred to as ‘Reference Intakes’ (RIs) and they show how much of your body’s daily calorie or nutrient requirement that the food provides. **NOTE: unless stated otherwise this is based on an average sized woman who does an average amount of physical activity per day.**

Step 3 - Keep Physically Active



Being active is good for our physical health and it also makes you feel good. Making small changes in your everyday life all adds up to getting the balance right between the calories you eat and the energy you use up so try to 'Sit Less and Move More' throughout the day. Getting more exercise can help reduce your risk of chest, heart and stroke diseases.

How Much Physical Activity Do I Need?



	MODERATE ACTIVITY	VIGOROUS ACTIVITY	STRENGTH BUILDING ACTIVITY
How will I feel	Increased breathing Feeling warmer Able to talk	Breathing fast Feeling warmer Sweating Unable to talk	Increased breathing Feeling warmer Able to talk
Examples	Brisk walking Cycling Swimming Pushing a lawnmower Dancing Water aerobics	Jog or run Play a sport Climbing stairs Skipping Martial arts Aerobics	Carry heavy bags Yoga and Pilates Gardening Hill walking Lifting weights Push-ups, sit-ups and squats

It is good to develop a physical activity routine throughout the week. Make sure the type and intensity of your activity is appropriate for your level of fitness.

Move More, Sit Less!

It is also important that we minimise the amount of time we are sitting or lying down. Break up periods of inactivity by moving around and stretching.

Mix It Up!

It is good to change up your activities to make sure you are using all muscles and joints and to keep you interested! Find activities you enjoy, and you will be more likely to continue doing it. Put on your favourite music to keep you motivated and encourage a family member or a friend to join you.

There are many ways we can be a little more active every day:



Walk up the stairs – don't take the lift



Pace up and down while talking on the phone



Walk to the local shops or to leave the kids to school



Instead of dozing in front of the TV, get up and walk around the room when you feel sleepy



Have a quick walk during your lunch hour or after dinner in the evening



Get off the bus one or two stops early and walk from there



If you have a dog start to walk further or faster, or more regularly



If you have a car, wash it by hand instead of going to a carwash

Benefits Of Being Active

- Lowering blood pressure
- Increasing 'good' cholesterol and reducing 'bad' cholesterol
- Helps to control blood glucose levels
- Better cardiovascular fitness
- Helps maintain a healthy weight
- Strengthens muscles and joints
- Helps to manage stress levels
- Makes you feel and sleep better

Make a start today, it's never too late.
Remember any activity is better than none.

Step 4 - Stop Smoking



Stopping smoking can have a big positive impact on your physical health and financial wellbeing and it's never too late to quit. If you quit cigarettes for 28 days you're five times more likely to quit for good and help is at hand to support you to take the first step in quitting.

Cigarettes are made up of over **7000 chemicals**. These chemicals **increase your risk of chest, heart and stroke illnesses**.

What Are The Benefits Of Quitting?

Every cigarette shortens your life by 5 minutes. If you smoke 11 a day, by quitting you will:



After 20 mins

Your heart rate & blood pressure return to normal



After 8 hours

Nicotine & Carbon Monoxide levels in blood are halved



After 48 mins

The carbon monoxide is gone from your body & your sense of taste & smell improves



After 72 hours

Breathing feels easier & you have more energy



After 2 - 12 weeks

Your circulation improves pumping blood better around the body



After 3 - 9 months

Any coughing, wheezing or breathing problems will improve



After 1 year

Your risk of a heart attack is halved



After 5 years

Your risk of a stroke is halved



After 15 years

Your risk of a heart attack is now the same as a non smoker



After 15 years

You've saved £39,146
You've saved 225 days of your life

Practical Tips For Quitting



Set a quit date and stick to it.



Tell family and friends.



Get rid of all your cigarettes, lighters and ashtrays.



Consider possible triggers such as a stressful situation or going out with friends, and plan ways to deal with them.



Snack on healthy foods and drinks.



Change your routine.



Keep your hands busy, do a puzzle or craft.



A craving only lasts for 3 minutes so try and distract yourself.

Smokers are almost twice as likely to have a heart attack compared with people who never smoked

Electronic - Cigarettes

E-cigarettes have been marketed as a cheaper alternative to cigarettes. NICHS recognises that existing smokers may use e-cigarettes to cut down and/or quit smoking, however, in the absence of proper regulation and robust research to ensure product safety and quality, NICHS does not endorse the use of e-cigarettes. NICHS recommends that smokers use currently approved stop smoking programmes, products and medicines approved by the Public Health Agency.

Support For Quitting

You are more likely to quit successfully if you get professional help and nicotine replacements. Check out the following for more information on stop smoking services and support:

- www.stopsmokingni.info for stop-smoking-services and Quit Kits
- Download the NHS quit smoking app available on iPhone or Android phones

Step 5 -

Moderate Your Alcohol Intake



Impact On Health

Drinking too much alcohol can have a devastating effect on your cardiovascular health, in other words, your heart and blood vessels.

It can cause high blood pressure and atrial fibrillation, which is a type of irregular heartbeat, both of which can increase your risk of heart failure, heart attack and stroke.

Alcohol contains a lot of calories so drinking too much can lead to weight gain and even obesity, which increases the risk of poor heart health. It can also lead to liver problems and increase the risk of some cancers.



Alcohol Guidelines

Guidelines from the UK Chief Medical Officer state that there's no safe level of alcohol consumption.

However, if you do drink alcohol, men and women should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol each week and you should have several alcohol-free days every week.

In the UK alcohol is measured in units. 1 unit is equal to 10mls of pure alcohol.

Binge Drinking

Binge drinking is defined as drinking alcohol in a short space of time or drinking to get drunk.

Because everybody is different, it is not easy to say exactly how many units in one session count as binge drinking. The definition used by the Office of National Statistics states:

- For **men** this equates to drinking more than **8 units** in one sitting.
- For **women** it means drinking more than **6 units** in one sitting.

Alcohol Units Guide



Pint of premium
beer (5%)
2.8 units



Pint of cider
(5%)
2.8 units



Alcopop 275ml
(4%)
1.4 units



Can of beer 330ml
(4%)
1.7 units



Gin/ Vodka / Rum
35ml (37.5%)
1.3 units



Spirits 1 litre
(37.5%)
37 units



Small bottle of wine
187.5ml (12%)
2.3 units



Bottle of wine 750ml
(12%)
9.2 units

Reducing Alcohol Intake



Know your limits - how many units are in your favourite drinks?



Alternate each alcoholic drink with a non-alcoholic drink.



Check out the alcohol content ABV%.



Avoid drinking in rounds or having a kitty.



Have something to eat before you start drinking.



Keep track of your drinks and don't let anyone top up your drink until it's finished.

Step 6 - Manage Your Stress Levels



While stress is not a direct risk factor for chest, heart and stroke conditions, it does impact on your health, particularly by how we choose to cope with stress.

What Is Stress?

Stress is a natural reaction in the body, designed to give us short bursts of heightened energy or awareness as part of our instinctive 'fight or flight' reaction. We may experience stress because of worries about relationships, money, work, unemployment or ill health.

Pressure can help motivate us to be productive but prolonged periods of increased pressure leading to stress, can have serious consequences on health.

Signs And Symptoms Of Stress

Stress can impact us emotionally, mentally and physically and the most common signs of stress include:

- sleeping problems
- sweating
- loss of appetite
- difficulty concentrating

Managing Stress

Many people cope with stress by smoking, drinking too much alcohol and over-eating. These things can increase your risk of high blood pressure and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Try to identify what makes you feel stressed as this can help you avoid or cope with stressors in your life.

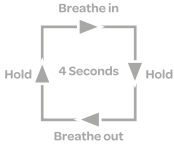
Making changes to your lifestyle and using positive coping techniques can help you manage stress and improve your wellbeing.

Did you Know?

- We have around 60,000 thoughts per day.
- 99% of our time is spent in imagination.
- 1% of our time is spent in reality.
- Be more in the present – why not try mindfulness!

For more information and stress management videos, visit www.nichs.org.uk/information/risk-factors/stress

Positive Coping Strategies



1. Squared Breathing

Breathing exercises keep your mind focused and help lower your heart rate and blood pressure.

.....



2. Reframing

Reframing is a technique which helps you view things in a different, less stressful light.

.....



3. Mindfulness

Helps us to live in the present moment by using the natural tools of our breath, our body and our sense as anchors.

.....



4. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

This mindfulness technique aims to distract your brain from the past or future by forcing it to focus on things in your present environment.

- 5 - things you see
 - 4 - things you hear
 - 3 - things you feel
 - 2 - things you smell
 - 1 - thing you taste
-



5. Physical Activity

Improves our physical health and also our mental wellbeing by releasing feel-good hormones in the brain.



6. Connect

Connect with the people around you to support and enrich your life: family, friends, colleagues and neighbours.

.....



7. Give

Giving stimulates the reward system in the brain, making a person feel good and increases their self-worth.

.....



8. Keep Learning

Learning throughout our lives contributes to self-esteem, social interaction, competence and self-efficacy.

.....



9. Talk

Talking about your feelings can really help identify what is causing the stress.

.....



10. Good Mood Foods

Certain foods contain nutrients that can improve our mood: oily fish, dark green leafy vegetables, berries, bananas, nuts and seeds and small amounts of dark chocolate.

Step 7 - Sleep Well



Sleep is a vital, component of everyone's overall health and wellbeing as it enables the body to repair and reduces the risk of heart disease, diabetes and stroke. This is regardless of your age, weight, smoking and exercise habits.

Sleeping too little can disrupt underlying health conditions and negatively affect biological processes like blood pressure, glucose levels and inflammation. The same may be true for oversleeping. During sleep, your body repairs cells, stores new information in the brain and removes waste from it, along with restoring energy.

For children and young people, sleep is important for their growth and development.

Sleep Recommendations

The ideal amount of sleep can vary from person to person;

Adults need around 7-9 hours of sleep a night

Children need around 10 -12 hours of sleep a night

Benefits Of A Good Night's Sleep

- 1. Boosts immunity** – prolonged lack of sleep can disrupt your immune system, making it harder for your body to fight against infections.
- 2. Maintain a healthy weight** – improving your sleeping patterns can help you maintain a healthy weight as it suppresses hunger and signals fullness in the brain.
- 3. Improves mental wellbeing** – a single sleepless night can often make you irritable and moody the following day. Ongoing lack of sleep may lead to long-term mood disorders including anxiety and depression.
- 4. Reduces the risk of diabetes** – lack of sleep can impact on blood sugar levels due to its effects on insulin, cortisol and oxidative stress.
- 5. Reduces the risk of heart disease** – not getting enough sleep over a long period of time is associated with increased heart rate, high blood pressure and higher levels of chemicals linked with inflammation, which may put extra strain on your heart.
- 6. Increases fertility** – sleep regulates important hormones in your body, including fertility-related hormones.

Did You Know That What You Do During The Day Can Also Improve The Quality Of Your Sleep?



Exercise during the day or early evening.



Set a regular bedtime and waking-up time, including the weekend.



Try some foods that promote sleep such as bananas, cherries, oats and nuts.



Ensure your sleeping environment is comfortable including the temperature, having the room dark and tidy.



Avoid caffeine, technology and eating big meals late at night. Also avoid alcohol.



Preventing Heart Disease And Stroke

Keeping healthy is the most important thing we can do to help prevent heart disease and stroke. No one wants to be ill but so often the choices we make every day can impact on our health.

This booklet has described the risk factors for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. A risk factor is something that increases our chance of becoming ill, and the more of these risk factors we have in our lives, the higher our chance of ill health.

But if we maintain a healthy weight, are active, manage our stress levels, get a good night's sleep, stop smoking and keep to safe levels of alcohol, we are really giving ourselves the best chance possible.

Making lifestyle changes can be difficult, with many factors outside our control influencing our health and lifestyles. Committing to one lifestyle change can make a big difference.

Big changes start with little changes. We hope this booklet helps you make that change, whether you want to lose weight, get active or quit smoking. It is also important to pass these messages on to the next generation.

Encourage your children to be healthy and make them aware of the risk factors. A healthy life is one of the most important gifts you can give them.

For further information on how to stay healthy, you can visit our website, your local pharmacy, other supporting organisations and for specific health advice, contact your GP.

Please note that the information in this booklet is not a substitute for the advice your doctor or other health professionals may give you based on their knowledge of your condition.



Almost 90% of our care and prevention services and research are funded exclusively by public donations.

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

Follow us:

 Facebook: www.facebook.com/NorthernIrelandChestHeartandStroke

 Twitter: @nichstweet

 Instagram: @nichestheartandstroke

 LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/nichs

 TikTok: @nichestheartandstroke

Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

21 Dublin Road, Belfast BT2 7HB

t. 028 9032 0184

www.nichs.org.uk



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
We invest in people Gold

Charity Reg No. NIC 103593
Company No. NI 18889
A Charity Limited by Guarantee

