

# Tips for a Healthy Heart

Earlier this month Public Health England released figures from an analysis of 1.2 million people, 33,000 of whom were men aged 50, that assessed heart age. Worryingly, it found that a tenth of men aged 50 have a heart age of 10 years older, with this news the subject of heart health and its impact have never been more important.

A healthy heart can reduce your risk of developing heart disease and other cardiovascular problems and there are multiple things that you can do to affect the overall health of your heart, ranging from altering the amount and type of food you eat as well as the amount of physical activity that you do.

## HEART AGE

You will be able to calculate your heart age by [clicking here](#)



In the UK 160,000 people die from cardiovascular disease (CVD) a year, it is the leading cause of death before the age of 65. In addition to this it is estimated that CVD costs the UK economy £19 billion a year, this is in direct healthcare costs to productivity losses and informal care. There are certain risk factors that can increase your chances of developing heart disease, some of these are modifiable (such as obesity and smoking) and others are non-modifiable (such as age and gender).

Due to these issues, we have compiled a short list that focuses on what vital changes an individual can make that will improve their heart health. Hopefully these, along with the statistics from Public Health England will help empower people to understand what action they can take.

## Weight Management



Being overweight or obese can increase your chances of developing diabetes and high blood pressure (which are also risk factors for CVD). Therefore managing your weight is of vital importance, whilst this is often difficult to achieve and involves a wide variety of factors, there is no doubt that those who maintain their weight within the 'normal' range will have healthier hearts. A key way of managing your weight is to stick to a healthy and balanced diet. This should be low in sugars and fat, with plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre. Many studies have demonstrated the benefits of a balanced diet.

Further to this, obesity is an inflammatory disease and can encourage the development of conditions like atherosclerosis. This causes arteries to clog up with white blood cells and fatty substances, which can eventually lead to heart disease. Maintaining your weight at a healthy level will keep your heart healthy as well as affecting many other aspects of your overall health.

## Exercise



Whilst increasing your exercise will most probably form part of your regime to maintain your weight, it is also extremely useful in increasing the strength of your heart. The NHS recommends that people should partake in at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week to help stave off CVD. This includes any activity that gets you moving and forces you to break into a sweat.

Recently, the NHS launched a 10-minute active app that will help you fit exercise into your day. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated the benefits of regular exercise on the heart for those hoping to prevent CVD as well as those with established disease. Whilst improving your overall fitness exercising will lower your blood pressure and can even help control your blood sugar levels, it also releases endorphins within your body helping to make you feel good and giving you more energy.

## Lower Cholesterol

Much like exercise, improving your diet will help you to maintain your weight. However focusing on lowering your cholesterol is vital if you want to improve your heart health. It is estimated that in the UK over half of adults have a raised cholesterol. Healthy adults should aim for a total cholesterol of below 5 mmol/L and an LDL-cholesterol (the 'bad' cholesterol) below 3 mmol/L. Your level of cholesterol can be measured with a simple blood test, high levels of LDL cholesterol can build up in your bloodstream and harden to form plaques, blocking your arteries. Its levels can be reduced by limiting the amount of saturated fat in your diet and increasing the amount of fibre. Foods such as meat, butter, cream, hard cheeses, and cakes contain high amounts of saturated fat; whilst oily fish, nuts, seeds, and vegetable oils contain higher levels of unsaturated fats, to name a few. Cholesterol lowering is best performed by altering your diet and increasing the amount of exercise you do, however if these changes are failing to make a difference your doctor can prescribe drugs known as statins which have been shown to reduce cholesterol levels.



## Blood Pressure

Managing your blood pressure is also a key factor in reducing your risk of developing CVD. Globally, 11% of all disease burden in developed countries is caused by a raised blood pressure and around 1 in 4 adults in the UK have high blood pressure, although many don't know it. By regularly checking and regulating your blood pressure you will help to keep your heart healthy. High blood pressure itself is massively affected by your weight, excess fat causes your heart to work harder, and this places more pressure on your blood vessel walls, this in turn can cause damage and therefore atherosclerosis, as discussed earlier. It has been shown that by altering certain aspects of your lifestyle you will be able to lower your blood pressure. For example, reducing the amount of salt that you eat, losing weight, exercising regularly, getting enough (at least 7 hours) of sleep a night, and not consuming too much caffeine.



## Smoking and Alcohol



About 14% of deaths from circulatory disease are attributed to smoking, whilst in the UK more than a third of men and a quarter of women exceed the government's recommendation for alcohol. It has been said that stopping smoking is the single best thing you can do for your health as it is the most important factor in increasing a person's risk of CVD. Smoking itself damages the lining of your arteries and causes the build-up of atheromas (fatty plaques), this narrows your blood vessels. Furthermore, the carbon monoxide from smoke reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood, meaning your heart has to pump harder to supply your body with oxygen; this is exacerbated by your body's production of adrenaline that is stimulated by cigarettes. By stopping smoking, you will not only be improving your heart health but you will also be vastly reducing your chances of developing lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases. In addition to this alcohol has been shown to result in abnormal heart rhythms, high blood pressure and damage to your heart muscle, by adhering to the NHS recommendations, you will be able to maintain a healthier heart.

**By using these tips, you should be able to go some way to maintaining a healthy heart, however this list is not exhaustive and there are many other ways that you can look after your heart and therefore your overall health.**

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