

# Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease, also known as heart and circulatory disease, covers all diseases that affect the heart and circulation. These include conditions such as coronary heart disease (angina and heart attack) and stroke.

## What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease is caused by a gradual build up of fatty deposits in the walls of your coronary arteries, which can then cause them to narrow. The medical term for this condition is atherosclerosis.

Over time, these fatty deposits may narrow the artery so much that it can't deliver enough oxygen to your heart, especially when you're exerting yourself. This can lead to angina a pain or discomfort in your chest, often described as a crushing pain that can radiate to the jaw and arm.

If a piece of this fatty material breaks away from the artery wall it can cause a clot to form, which will then starve a portion of your heart muscle of blood and oxygen. This is known as a heart attack myocardial infarction.

If you suspect that you or someone else is having a heart attack, call 999 immediately, as recognising and treating a heart attack early increase the chances of survival.

## What is a stroke?

The arteries in your neck take blood carrying vital oxygen and nutrients to your brain. If these arteries begin to narrow because of a build up of fatty material, it can affect this vital supply route.

A stroke happens when the artery carrying blood to your brain is blocked. A stroke can also be caused by bleeding from an artery into your brain.

Stroke can affect the way your body works and the way you think.

If you suspect that someone is having a stroke, think FAST.

- **F**acial weakness – can they smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- **A**rm weakness – can they raise both arms?
- **S**peech problems – can they speak clearly and understand what you are saying?
- **T**ime to call 999

Act FAST. Recognising and treating a stroke early can limit the damage.

## What causes cardiovascular disease?

The following factors increase your risk of developing cardiovascular disease:

- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese

- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- A family history of heart disease
- Age – as you get older, your risk increases
- Ethnic group – some ethnic groups have a higher risk of heart disease. For example, South Asian people living in the UK have a higher risk than the rest of the UK population.

If you think that you may be at risk, then you should visit your GP or practice nurse who can assess your risk by carrying out a health check.

You should also consider making changes to your lifestyle in order to reduce your risk of heart disease.

### How can I prevent heart disease?

Making small changes to your lifestyle is the simple answer. To reduce the chances of developing the condition, or if you already have it, the following can help to keep your heart healthy and reduce the risk of future problems:

- Stop smoking
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Control high blood pressure
- Reduce your “bad” cholesterol level (LDL)
- Be physically active
- Control your blood glucose if you have diabetes
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet and only drink moderate amounts of alcohol.

### References

<http://www.bhf.org.uk> available on 26/7/2010

<http://www.stroke.org.uk/> available on 26/7/2010