

# Reducing your risk of heart disease

Department of Cardiac Rehabilitation

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: January 2024

Next review: January 2027

Leaflet number: 1097 Version:2

## Introduction

You are currently on a cardiac rehabilitation programme. This is to help you get back to as full a life as possible after a cardiac event such as a heart attack, heart surgery or a stent procedure. This leaflet will help you understand the risk factors for heart disease and how you can control them to reduce your risk of having future cardiac events.

## What is heart disease?

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a general term for conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels. There are many different types of CVD 1 of which is coronary heart disease.

Coronary heart disease happens when the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the heart muscle is blocked or reduced. This puts an increased strain on the heart, and can lead to:

- chest pain caused by restricted blood flow to the heart muscle (angina).
- heart attacks, where the blood flow to the heart muscle is suddenly blocked.
- heart failure, where the heart is unable to pump blood around the body properly.

## What are risk factors?

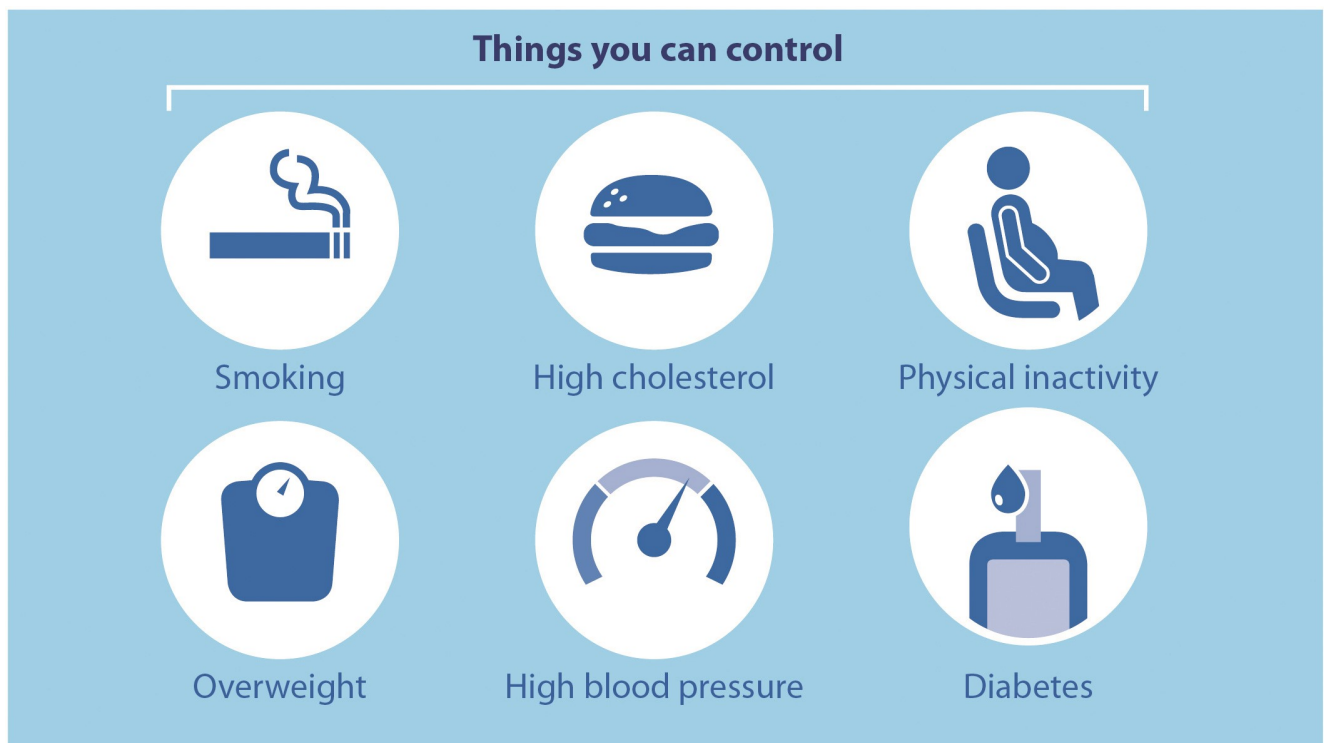
The exact cause of CVD is not clear, but there are lots of things that can increase your risk of getting it. These are called "risk factors". The more risk factors you have, the greater your chances of developing CVD.

Risk factors are conditions and lifestyle factors that increase your risk of developing a disease. The good news is that a lot of risk factors that cause heart disease can be controlled, treated and reduced with lifestyle changes.

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The main risk factors you can control are shown in picture below:



### Other factors that affect your risk of developing heart disease:

- If you have a family history of CVD, your risk of developing it is also increased.
- In the UK, CVD is more common in people of South Asian and African or Caribbean background. This is because people from these backgrounds are more likely to have other risk factors for CVD, such as high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes.
- CVD is most common in people over 50 and your risk of developing it increases as you get older.
- Men are more likely to develop CVD at an earlier age than women.
- A diet high in ultra-processed foods and sweetened drinks can lead to poor general health and onto high cholesterol and high blood pressure.
- Drinking too much alcohol can also increase your cholesterol and blood pressure levels, and contribute to weight gain.

### What do I need to do to reduce my risk?

- The risk factor chart on page 4 is designed for you to find your risk level in each category.
- You will need to know your results to see what your current risk level is. You may need to ask your cardiac rehabilitation professional or GP for some of the results.
- If any of your results fall into the moderate or high category, a cardiac rehabilitation professional can work with you during your cardiac rehabilitation programme to reduce your risk. This may mean getting in touch with other agencies or departments to get help.

- You can re-check your level of risk throughout the programme and on completion to identify any changes.
- You could even use the chart regularly after completing your cardiac rehabilitation. This is to make sure you stay on track and stick with any positive changes you have made.

## Measuring your risk levels

The key terms for measurements given below are used within the risk factor chart on page 4.

- **HbA1c:** this is your average blood sugar level. This can be tested by your GP surgery. If you are diabetic this test will probably be done every few months.
- **BMI:** the body mass index (BMI) is a measure that uses your height and weight to work out if your weight is healthy. A healthy eating program increases your ability to keep this.
- **Systolic blood pressure:** the pressure when your heart pushes blood out.
- **Diastolic blood pressure:** the pressure when your heart rests between beats.
- **Cholesterol:** an essential fat in the blood. This is needed for growth and good health. But having too much raises your risk of serious problems such as heart disease and strokes.
- **LDL-cholesterol:** Most common in our blood. It is very small and easily collects to cause build-up of fatty deposits (plaques) in your arteries. We know reducing this by even 1mmol/L has a big impact on population health. New guidelines suggest there is no lower level for this blood test.
- **HDL-cholesterol:** this is also called the “good” cholesterol, because it carries excess cholesterol back to your liver. Your liver then removes the cholesterol from your body.
- **Cholesterol or HDL ratio:** the ratio of total cholesterol to HDL is an easy way to check if your cholesterol levels are healthy. Keeping this low long-term can help reduce your risk of heart problems in the future.
- **Triglycerides:** this is a type of fat in your blood that is stored in your body’s fat cells. Having a high triglyceride level increases your risk of heart disease.

## Your risk factor chart

- Use the chart below to find out what your level of risk is in each category.
- Ask your cardiac rehabilitation professional if you need help finding out any of your results.
- Your results will let you see if there are any changes you need to make to improve your heart health and your health in general.

Risk factor	Low risk	Moderate risk	High risk
Smoking	Non-smoker or Ex-smoker quit over 6 months ago	Ex-smoker quit less than 6 months ago	Smoker
Diabetes	Hba1c: below 5.9%	Hba1c: 5.9% to 6.5%	Hba1c: over 6.5%
Obesity	BMI: 20 to 24.9	BMI: 25 to 29.9	BMI: over 30
High blood pressure	Systolic: below 120mmhg  Diastolic: below 80mmhg	Systolic: 120 to 139mmhg  Diastolic: 80 to 89mmhg	Systolic: above 140mmhg  Diastolic: above 90mmhg
Being inactive	Very active	Light to moderate activity	Inactive
Depression	Not clinically depressed	Mildly depressed	Clinically depressed
High cholesterol	LDL: no lower figure  Cholesterol or HDL ratio: below 4  Triglycerides: below 1.1mmol/L	LDL: 1.4 to 3.3mmol/L  Cholesterol or HDL ra- tio: 4 to 6  Triglycerides: 1.1 to 1.7 mmol/L	LDL: above 3.4 mmol/L  Cholesterol or HDL ra- tio: above 6  Triglycerides: above 1.7 mmol/L

Use the chart below to record your own results and check your progress. The first line has been used as an example to show you how to use the chart.

[illegible]

### Lifestyle changes that can reduce the risk of heart disease



Quit smoking



Check your  
cholesterol  
regularly



Check your  
blood pressure  
regularly



If you have Diabetes,  
keep blood glucose  
well controlled



Be more active,  
brisk walk or taking  
the stairs



Lose weight

### Contact details

Cardiac Rehabilitation Department: 0116 258 3986 (Monday to Friday, 9 am to 4 pm).

Please contact us if you have any questions.

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على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
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