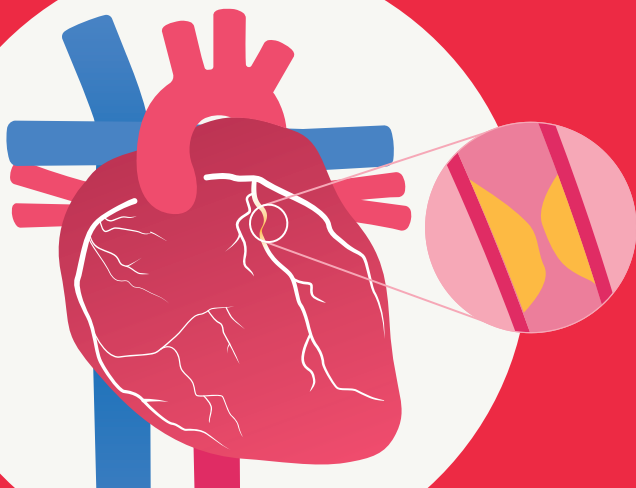


bhf.org.uk



Understanding **coronary** heart disease



About this booklet

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with coronary heart disease, it can be a worrying time.

This booklet is a starting point. It can help you find out:

- what it means to have coronary heart disease
- how to manage coronary heart disease
- how to look after your heart and where to get support.

It can feel overwhelming to be given lots of information about your heart. Please use this booklet when you're ready. There's no need to read it all at once.

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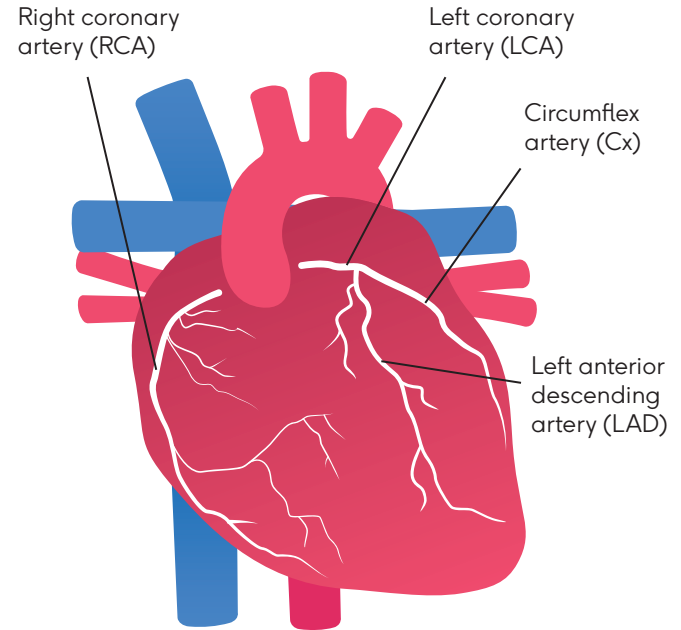
What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is when the blood supply to your heart is reduced or blocked because of a build-up of fatty material inside your coronary arteries. This fatty material is called atheroma (or plaque).

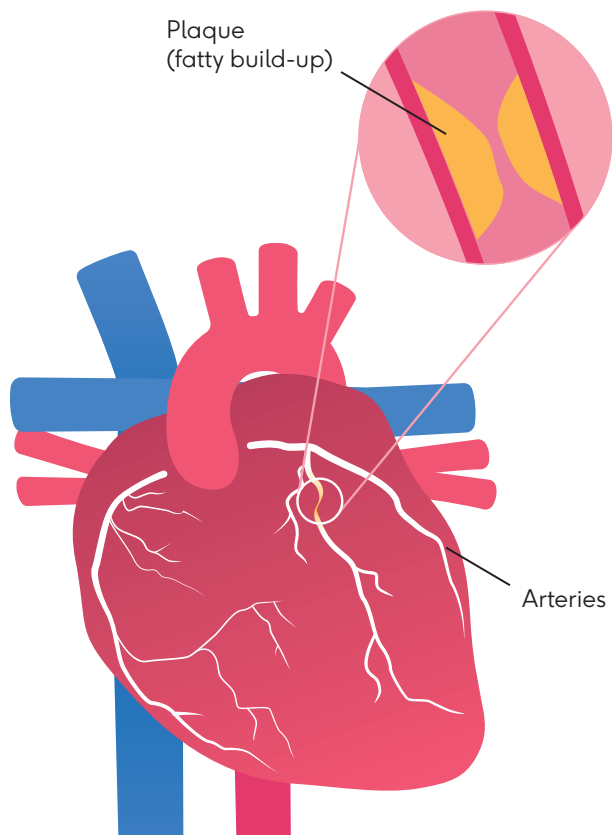
Your coronary arteries supply blood to your heart. Arteries are small tubes that carry blood to and from your heart. If they become narrow or blocked your heart may not get enough blood and oxygen to work properly.

Sometimes people call coronary heart disease CHD or heart disease.

Coronary arteries



Coronary heart disease



Is coronary heart disease dangerous?

Having coronary heart disease increases the chance of other heart and circulatory conditions, such as:

- a heart attack
- stroke
- abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmia)
- heart failure.

But coronary heart disease can be treated and managed so you can live well and reduce your risk of a heart attack, stroke or other conditions.

It's important to make lifestyle changes and take the medicine you're prescribed. There are lots of small changes you can make to build heart-healthy habits.

Find out more on pages 32 to 56.

What makes fatty material build up in your arteries?

There are a number of risk factors that can cause fatty material (plaque) to build up in your arteries.

A risk factor is something that increases your chance of getting a condition. You may have more than one risk factor.

Risk factors could include:

- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- diabetes
- smoking
- living with excess weight or obesity
- having too much saturated fat, salt and sugar in your diet
- not doing enough physical activity
- family history of coronary heart disease
- getting older.

Men have a higher risk of developing coronary heart disease from a younger age.

Before the menopause, women have a lower risk of being affected by coronary heart disease. But during and after the menopause, women's risk of coronary heart disease increases.

If you're transgender, you may have a higher risk of coronary heart disease.

If you're worried about your risk speak to your GP.

You can also read more about your risk at **[bhf.org.uk/riskfactors](https://www.bhf.org.uk/riskfactors)**

What are the symptoms of coronary heart disease?

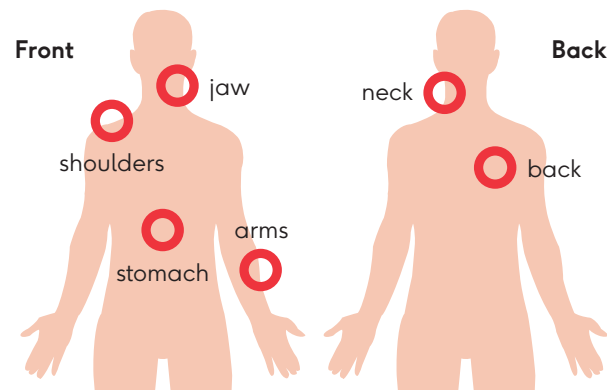
Many people with coronary heart disease do not have any symptoms. Some people may only find out after having a heart attack.

Symptoms can include feeling:

- breathless
- faint
- sick.

You may also have chest pain or an uncomfortable feeling in your chest. This is called angina.

You can also feel angina in your:



Feelings of angina are different for everyone. You may have one of these symptoms or more than one.

Find more information on angina and how to manage it in our booklet **Understanding angina**. Order your free copy at [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications)

When to get help

It's important to know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack.

Call 999 for an ambulance if you:

- have pain or discomfort in your chest that happens suddenly and does not go away
- have pain that spreads to either arm, or to your neck, jaw, back or stomach
- feel sick, sweaty, light-headed or short of breath.

Heart attack symptoms vary from person to person. They can also feel similar to symptoms of angina. If you're unsure, call 999 for an ambulance.

If you think you might be having a heart attack:



How is coronary heart disease diagnosed?

Some people find out they have coronary heart disease after having a heart attack.

Other people find out they have coronary heart disease after a health check or tests for symptoms, like angina.

Tests you may have include:

- electrocardiogram (ECG)
- echocardiogram (echo)
- chest X-ray
- coronary angiogram
- MRI scan
- CT scan
- exercise stress test
- blood test
- myocardial perfusion scan.

These are common tests, but if you're worried or have any questions speak to your healthcare professional.

You can also find more information about these tests at **bhf.org.uk/tests**

Get a health check

If you're between 40 and 74 years old and live in England, you can get a free health check to assess your risk of coronary heart disease. The rest of the UK also have similar schemes. Speak to your GP to book a health check.

If you're over 75 years old you may still be able to get a health check. Speak to your GP to find out more.

Get support with your diagnosis

Being told you have a heart condition and could have a higher risk of a heart attack can be scary. Some people want information to understand what's happening, but others prefer not to or want information later.

Talking it through and finding out what to expect can help you and your loved ones. It might help to know you are not alone and there is support available.

Here are some of the ways British Heart Foundation can help you:

Call the Heart Helpline

If you want someone to talk to, you can speak to our cardiac nurses. Your friends and family can also call if they want to understand what's happening or have questions.

Call **0808 802 1234** (freephone) or email **hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk** Our helpline is open weekdays, 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays).

Find an online community

Our community on HealthUnlocked is a free online space for people with heart and circulatory conditions to share experiences and get support from one another.

Visit **healthunlocked.com**

Get information in another format

We have information on healthy living, angina, heart attacks and other topics in audio, easy read, braille and other languages.

Read or listen to our information online at **bhf.org.uk/infoforall**

How is coronary heart disease treated?

Treatment can help reduce your risk of a heart attack or heart problems in the future. It can also help manage any symptoms, like angina.

You may have more than one treatment for coronary heart disease.

Treatments include:

- medicine
- surgery and other procedures
- lifestyle changes.

Your doctor will discuss treatment options with you. You can ask them questions about the different options, and what it means for you.

Medicine

Your doctor may recommend one or more medicines to help manage your coronary heart disease.

Medicine can:

- lower your blood pressure
- widen your arteries
- prevent blood clots
- lower your cholesterol levels.

Medicines you may be given include:

- **a low dose of aspirin** helps prevent blood clots
- **antiplatelet medicines** help prevent blood clots
- **beta blockers** make your heart beat slower and with less force
- **ACE (angiotensin-converting enzyme) inhibitors** lower your blood pressure
- **angiotensin-2 receptor blockers (ARBs)** lower your blood pressure
- **nitrates (also called vasodilators)** widen your arteries

- **calcium channel blockers** relax your arteries and lower your blood pressure
- **diuretics (or water pills)** help remove excess water and salt from your body
- **statins** lower your cholesterol levels and protect your arteries by reducing the amount of fatty material that can build up.

If you're not sure what medicines you have been given or you have any questions about medicines, speak to your doctor.

You can also find more information on these medicines on our website at **bhf.org.uk/medication**

Many people find it hard to take medicine every day. But there are simple steps to make it easier:



Get into a routine



Give your body time to get used to medicine



Be mindful of your mental wellbeing



Speak to your pharmacist or GP before taking other medicines or supplements as they can interact with your medicine



Plan your medicine if you go away

Ask your pharmacist for a tablet organiser (dosette) box. It can help you organise your medicines and remember to take them.

What can I do about side effects?

Most people taking medicine for coronary heart disease do not experience any side effects. However, for some people side effects can have a big impact on their daily life.

Side effects can be caused by your medicine but could also be caused by other things such as your condition, stress or a change in your lifestyle.

It's worth bearing in mind that symptoms with any medicine may improve over time or even disappear.

If you're struggling with the side effects of your medicine, it's important you do not stop taking it before speaking to a healthcare professional.

Speak to your GP or a pharmacist. They can:

- find out if your medicine is causing the side effects
- help you manage side effects
- change the dose of your medicine if appropriate
- prescribe a different type of medicine
- recommend an alternative treatment.

Your doctor will discuss treatment options with you. You can ask them questions about the different options, and what they mean for you.

If you're worried about side effects talk to one of our cardiac nurses.



Call 0808 802 1234 (freephone)
to speak to a cardiac nurse.
Our helpline is open weekdays
9am to 5pm (excluding bank
holidays).

Surgery and other procedures

Your doctor may recommend a procedure to increase the blood flow to your heart muscle.

There are two procedures for coronary heart disease:

- coronary angioplasty with stenting
- coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery.

Your doctor will talk to you about the best option for you.

Coronary angioplasty with stenting

A coronary angioplasty with stenting is a procedure to widen a blocked coronary artery. It's also known as percutaneous coronary intervention or PCI.

A tiny balloon is used to flatten the fatty build-up (plaque) in your artery. You may also have a stent (a metal, mesh tube) put in your artery to hold it open.

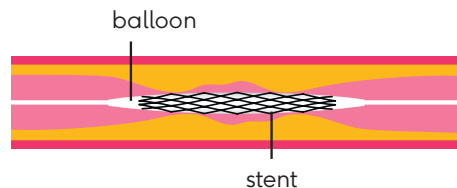
The procedure takes about one hour. You'll usually go home the same day or the day after.

Read our booklet **Understanding coronary angioplasty and stents**. Order your free copy at [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications)

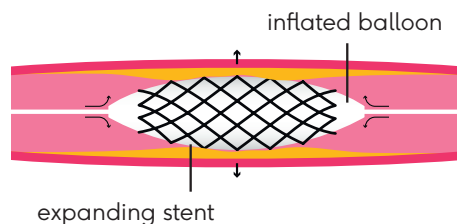
Step 1



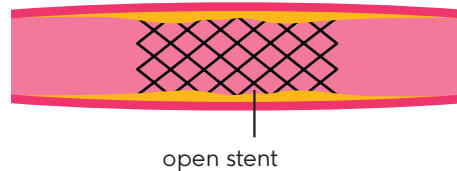
Step 2



Step 3



Step 4



Coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery

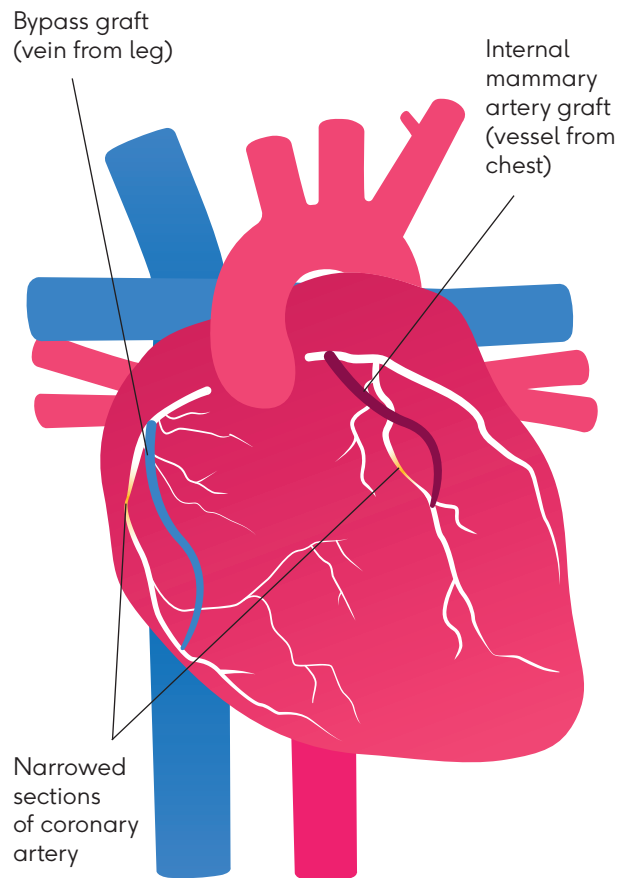
Coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery is also known as heart bypass surgery. It might sound like people are calling it a 'cabbage'.

During surgery, a blood vessel is taken from another part of your body, usually from your leg, arm or chest. It's then attached to your coronary artery above and below the narrow or blocked area.

This new blood vessel is called a graft. It goes around (bypasses) the blocked artery to bring back normal blood flow.

The surgery usually takes four to five hours. You'll be able to go home one week later if you're recovering well.

Read our booklet **Understanding coronary artery bypass surgery**. Order your free copy at [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications)



Cardiac rehabilitation

After an angioplasty or coronary bypass surgery you should be offered cardiac rehabilitation (cardiac rehab).

Cardiac rehab is a programme of exercise and education sessions. It can be done online, in person or a mix of both. It's a vital part of your recovery, helping you get back to as full a life as possible.

It's also a good opportunity to meet other people going through a similar situation and ask any questions you may have.

Find out more in our booklet **Understanding cardiac rehabilitation**. Order your free copy at [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications)

If you have not been offered cardiac rehab, speak to your GP. You can also speak to your local cardiac rehab team, search **[cardiac-rehabilitation.net](https://www.cardiac-rehabilitation.net)**



Lifestyle changes

If you've been diagnosed with coronary heart disease, your doctor will recommend making some lifestyle changes.

These changes can help you look after your heart health and reduce your risk of a heart attack or other heart conditions in the future.

It can feel overwhelming to think about changes to your daily life. But you can make small swaps over time to build up healthier habits.

Changes include:



getting more exercise



stopping smoking



having less salt, saturated fat and sugar in your diet



maintaining a healthy weight



reducing the amount of alcohol you drink.

You'll find lots of simple swaps and easy tips on pages 34 to 56.

Living with coronary heart disease

Eating more fruit and vegetables and cutting back on food and drink that's high in saturated fat, sugar and salt can help you to manage coronary heart disease.

Try these simple food swaps:

- ✓ swap butter for spreads made from olive, rapeseed or sunflower oil
- ✓ eat wholemeal instead of white bread
- ✓ try sugar-free drinks instead of full sugar versions
- ✓ make sauces from scratch rather than buying ready-made
- ✓ eat more fish and less red meat
- ✓ bake or grill your food instead of frying.

We have lots of easy, daily swaps in our booklet **Eat better**. Order your free copy at [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications)

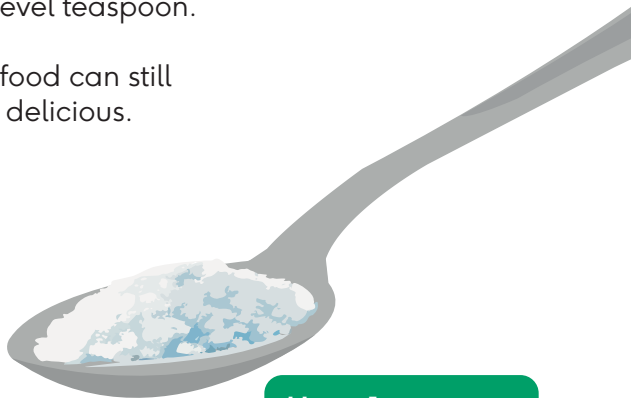


Have less salt

Cutting down on the amount of salt you eat is an important change you can make to look after your heart and lower your blood pressure.

Adults should eat less than 6g of salt each day. That's about one level teaspoon.

Your food can still taste delicious.



Up to 1 teaspoon
= (6g) salt a day

Try some of our tips for cutting down on salt:

- ✓ Remove salt from your table.
- ✓ Add less salt when you're cooking.
- ✓ Avoid ready-made rubs and sauces and make them yourself with less salt.
- ✓ Use herbs and spices for flavour instead of salt.
- ✓ Look for low-salt, reduced-salt or low-sodium options in your food shop.
- ✓ Swap salty snacks, like salted peanuts and crisps, for unsalted versions.

Have less sugar

Another way to look after your heart is to have less sugar. Whether you have a sweet tooth or not, you may be having too much sugar.

Adults should try to have less than 30g of sugar a day. That's about seven cubes of sugar, or around seven teaspoons.



Up to 7 cubes
= (30g) of
sugar a day

Try some of our tips for cutting down on sugar:

- ✓ Have less sugar, or no sugar, in your tea and coffee.
- ✓ Swap flavoured yoghurt for plain, low-fat yoghurt.
- ✓ Have sugar-free drinks instead of sugar sweetened fizzy drinks and squash.
- ✓ Replace sugary cereals with plain, wholegrain cereals.
- ✓ Avoid foods high in added sugar, like biscuits, cakes, breakfast bars and ready-made sauces.

Watch out for saturated fat

Looking out for foods high in saturated fat can help you to make healthier food choices and reduce your cholesterol.

Swap foods high in saturated fats for lower ones.

Try our heart-healthy recipes

It's normal to feel overwhelmed by new food choices and not know where to start.

You can find heart-healthy recipes that are low in saturated fat, salt and sugar on our website:

[bhf.org.uk/recipes](https://www.bhf.org.uk/recipes)

Cheeses	Swap with	Reduced fat cheese
Milk	Swap with	Semi-skimmed, 1% or skimmed
Butter, ghee or margarine	Swap with	Vegetable or olive oil spreads
Red and processed meat	Swap with	Chicken (without the skin) or fish
Cakes	Swap with	Malt loaf
Crisps	Swap with	A small handful of unsalted nuts or popcorn
Coconut or palm oil	Swap with	Olive, rapeseed or sunflower oil
Coconut cream or milk	Swap with	Plain yoghurt
Paneer	Swap with	Firm tofu



Look at food labels

It can also help to look at the colour coded labels on the food you buy. A good rule is to try to eat foods with mostly green and amber labels.

Using the food label card on page 43 can help you work out if a food is high (red), medium (orange) or low (green) amounts for fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt.



Food labelling guide

	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
Low Healthier choice	3g or less	1.5g or less	5g or less	0.3g or less
Medium Ok most of the time	3.1g to 17.5g	1.6g to 5g	5.1g to 22.5g	0.31g to 1.5g
High Just occasionally	More than 17.5g	More than 5g	More than 22.5g	More than 1.5g

All measures per 100g

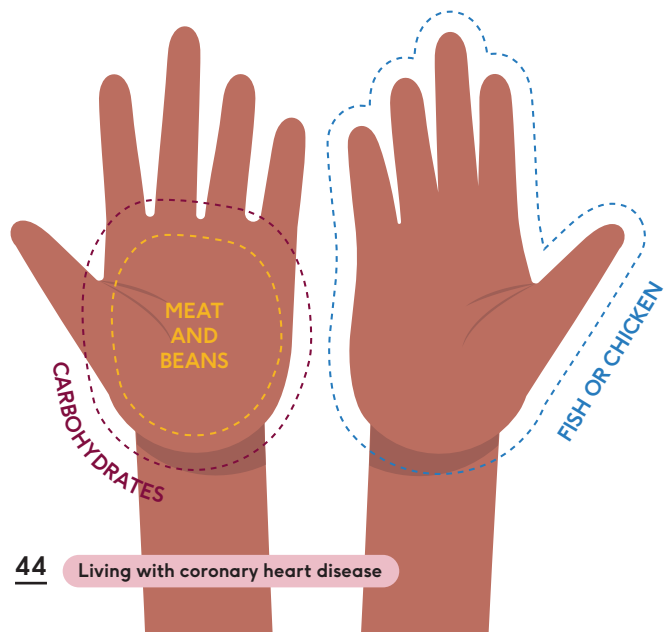
Cut it out and take it with you when you go food shopping.

Cut out and keep

Look at your portion sizes

A healthy diet is not just about what you eat, it's also about how much you eat. Getting portion sizes right is an important part of eating well and keeping to a healthy weight.

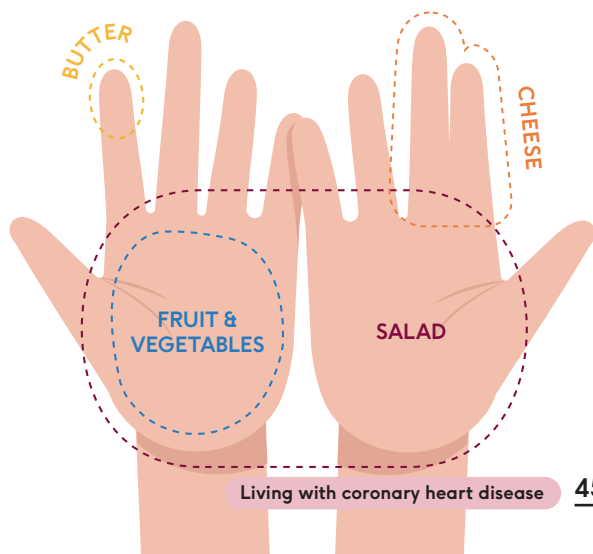
A quick and easy way to measure portions is to use your hand.



Tips for getting the right portion size:

- ✓ If you cook a big dinner, put leftovers into a food container straight away so you're not tempted to eat more than you need.
- ✓ Use a smaller plate to stop yourself from overloading your plate.
- ✓ If you're still feeling hungry, wait for 20 minutes before eating more. It can take a little while to feel full after eating.

Find more tips to help you manage your portion sizes at [bhf.org.uk/portionsize](https://www.bhf.org.uk/portionsize)



Move more

Moving regularly will help look after your heart. Exercise can help lower your cholesterol and keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

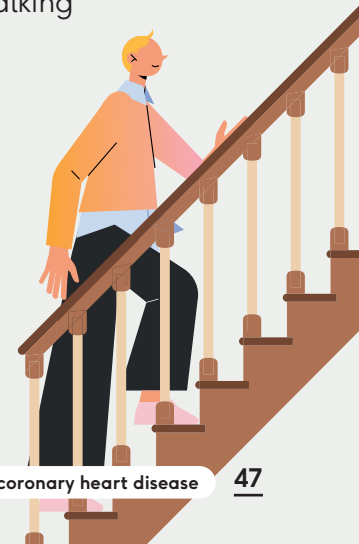
Lots of activities can get you moving, like walking, playing with kids or grandkids, gardening, or housework.

To look after your heart, you should aim to be active every day. Adults should try to do 150 minutes a week (around 20 to 30 minutes of exercise a day).



There are lots of ways to build exercise into your day.

- Get off the bus one stop early and walk the rest of the way.
- Walk to and from the station or school run instead of going by car.
- Get into a routine of walking each day, like at lunchtime.
- Try a new hobby or class, like gardening, yoga or walking groups.
- Make exercise social, you could go walking with a friend.
- If you can, use the stairs instead of a lift.
- Try exercises while sitting or use a chair for support.



Exercise can also help:



maintain a healthy weight



give you more energy



reduce anxiety



improve your sleep



boost your mood.

Many people find that exercise is a great way to meet new people, catch up with friends or have time to themselves. It can give you a break from your busy day.

The NHS also has exercises for all abilities, search **[nhs.uk/live-well/exercise](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise)**

You'll also find lots of tips and tricks for getting active at **[bhf.org.uk/heartmatters](https://www.bhf.org.uk/heartmatters)**

I'm finding it hard to move more

Starting small and building up your exercise can help it feel more manageable.

If you're not sure where to start, or you're finding exercise difficult, talk to your GP. They may be able to recommend local exercise schemes.

Drink less alcohol

Cutting down on the alcohol you drink can lower your cholesterol, lower your blood pressure, help maintain a healthy weight and look after your heart.

Adults should try to have 14 units or less a week, that's about:



Drinking can be a big part of socialising, or your weekly routine. But there are ways to make easy, manageable swaps to cut down.

Try having:

- ✓ a half pint of beer instead of a pint
- ✓ a small glass of wine instead of a large glass
- ✓ a small wine spritzer (with soda water) instead of a large glass of wine
- ✓ a single measure of spirits with diet mixer instead of a double
- ✓ alcohol-free and low-alcohol beers, wine or spirits.

Our **Eat better** booklet has more tips on healthier drinking choices. Order or read it online at bhf.org.uk/eatbetter-booklet

Stop smoking

Smoking makes you more likely to develop coronary heart disease. By quitting you can look after your heart and reduce your risk of problems in the future, like a heart attack.

There are lots of benefits to not smoking, like:



having more energy



breathing easier



improved fitness



better sense of smell and taste



reduced risk of a heart attack or stroke.

You can find lots of support and information to help you quit online. You may find these tips helpful.

- Set a quit date and tell your friends and family to help you stick to it.
- Keep healthy snacks and drinks in the house to help if you get unhealthy cravings.
- Use the money you save by not buying cigarettes to get yourself a reward at milestones.

Do not be afraid to ask for help. Speak to your GP or local pharmacy for help to stop smoking.

The NHS has a free stop smoking service to help you boost your chances of quitting. Search **'NHS stop smoking'**.

Find ways to help with stress

While stress does not make coronary heart disease worse, it can lead to unhealthy habits like eating and drinking more.

Over time this can make coronary heart disease worse.

There are lots of ways to reduce stress and feel more relaxed. You could:

- try relaxing exercises, like yoga or meditation
- download an app to help manage stress or listen to music and podcasts
- spend time with family, friends or pets
- practice breathing exercises – find out more at **bhf.org.uk/breathing-exercises**

Worries about your health

It's normal to feel anxious about your health, especially after getting a new diagnosis.

But sometimes, this can get in the way of living your life.

If you feel anxious or sad a lot of the time, and it's affecting your daily life, talk to your GP.

Do not be afraid to ask for help. You need to put yourself first. Many people feel better once they've spoken to someone.

You can also refer yourself to the NHS for talking therapies, like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Search '**NHS talking therapies**' for more information.

You can also get in touch with Mind at **mind.org.uk** for support with your mental health.

Maintain a healthy weight

We know how hard it can be to lose weight and stick to new lifestyle changes. Many of the tips in this booklet will help to manage your weight and look after your heart.

Being a healthy weight is about watching your portion sizes, swapping some unhealthy foods or snacks for healthier ones, avoiding packaged foods labelled in red, and being physically active.

Whatever your reasons are for wanting to lose weight, now is a great time to start. We're here to help and support you every step of the way.

Visit **bhf.org.uk/myweight**

Travel and life insurance

If you're diagnosed with coronary heart disease you need to tell your life and travel insurance company.

Many people can live well with coronary heart disease by making lifestyle changes and taking medicine. But it's important to make sure your insurance company knows about your condition in case you need to claim in the future.

Find out more about travel and life insurance at **bhf.org.uk/practicalsupport**

Get support to live a healthier lifestyle

It may feel overwhelming to be told you have coronary heart disease.

You may not know where to start, but small changes can make a big difference. In time you'll feel more confident in managing your health.

British Heart Foundation can help you find more information on looking after your heart. Including simple food swaps and manageable changes for you and your family.

Call the Heart Helpline

If you or your family are affected by coronary heart disease, our cardiac nurses can help you with your questions or concerns.

Call **0808 802 1234** (freephone)
or email **hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk**
Our helpline is open weekdays, 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays).

You can also speak to our nurses using the live chat feature. Find out more at **bhf.org.uk/helpline**

Join Heart Matters

Discover the benefits of Heart Matters, your free heart-health membership.

Join to receive our free magazine or email newsletter, featuring expert tips, heart-healthy recipes, inspiring stories, and the latest updates backed by BHF-funded science.

Guided by our team of experts, Heart Matters helps you to make small changes for a healthier heart.

bhf.org.uk/heartmatters

Order our information

We have lots of information about looking after your heart. Find helpful tips and easy swaps for a healthier heart in our booklet **Understanding your heart health**.

You can read and order our booklets for free at **bhf.org.uk/publications**

We also have information in audio, easy read, braille and other languages. Read or listen to our information online at **bhf.org.uk/infoforall**



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Further information



63

We are British Heart Foundation



Through research, information and support we're here for everyone affected by heart and circulatory conditions.

Get help

Speak to one of our experienced cardiac nurses for more information and support. They can help answer your questions, big or small.

You can call **0808 802 1234** (freephone).
Our helpline is open weekdays, 9am to 5pm
(excluding bank holidays).

Support our work

If you've found this information helpful and would like to support our work, please scan the QR code or visit bhf.org.uk/support-us



Scan here with
the camera
on your phone

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