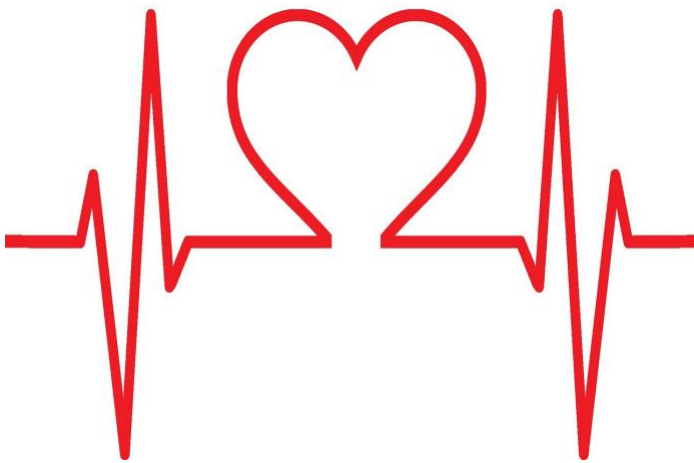


SALTIRE
SAFETY



Looking after your
heart.

Looking After Your Heart

Each day your heart beats about 100,000 times and pumps about 23,000 litres of blood around your body.

This blood delivers oxygen and nutrients to all parts of your body and carries away unwanted carbon dioxide and waste products. Your heart is a vital part of your circulatory system – it's in charge of moving blood and oxygen around your body – so it's important to keep on top of your heart health.

What can go wrong?

There are various ways in which the heart can be affected, some of these we can be born with and other can develop as we move through life.

Congenital Heart Disease

Some people are born with hearts that have not developed properly before birth – this is known as Congenital Heart Disease (CHD). CHD means a heart condition or defect that develops in the womb, before a baby is born. For example, a baby's heart valves may not have been properly formed. For many babies diagnosed with CHD their condition is a minor problem which either doesn't require treatment or can be successfully corrected with surgery. Other conditions can be more serious, however thanks to advances in technology, consultants are able to give early diagnosis and treatment.

Coronary Heart Disease

Coronary Heart Disease is when your coronary arteries become narrowed by a gradual build-up of fatty materials within their walls. Over time this build up can cause your arteries to become so narrow that they cannot deliver enough oxygen rich blood to your heart, the pain and discomfort this causes is known as Angina.

Angina, a less severe condition and not to be confused with heart attacks, can feel like heaviness or tightness in the chest, this may spread to other parts of your body such as your neck. Some people will also experience shortness of breath.

If a piece of the fatty build-up were to break away, this can form a blood clot, if it blocks the artery and cuts the supply of oxygen rich blood to your heart, your heart may become permanently damaged – this is known as a heart attack.

Heart Attack

A heart attack is life-threatening and if you think you are having one you should call an ambulance immediately, or do your best to alert somebody else to notify the emergency services. A heart attack happens when your heart muscle is starved of oxygen-rich blood, This causes damage to the muscle. Symptoms of heart attacks vary from person to person, the most common signs are:

- Chest pain: tightness, heaviness, pain or a burning feeling in your chest.
- Pain in arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach

- Sweating
- Feeling light headed
- Becoming short of breath and feeling nauseous.

Heart Failure

Heart failure means that for some reason your heart is not pumping blood around your body as well as it used to.

There are lots of reasons why you might be diagnosed with heart failure. It can be sudden or it can happen over months or even years.

The most common causes are a heart attack, high blood pressure and cardiomyopathy (a disease of the heart muscle, sometimes these are inherited from your family and sometimes they are caused by other things, such as viral infections).

Keeping your heart healthy

We all know the importance of having good heart health, it's the most important thing you can do to make sure you avoid any of the occurrences above. Maintaining a healthy heart is easier than it sounds as most of the key ways to keep your ticker ticking is to simply follow a healthy lifestyle.

Ten top tips for keeping your heart healthy:

1. **Give up smoking**
If you smoke, quit. It's the best thing you can do for your heart health.
2. **Get Active**
Do 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise a week. It's only 30 minutes 5 days a week. What are you waiting for? It's also a great stress buster.
3. **Manage your weight**
Try and stick to a healthy balanced diet low in 'the bad' fats and sugar. Add in a few veggies and your new physical activity routine and you're well on your way.
4. **Eat more fibre**
Fibre greatly reduces the risk of heart disease so you should aim for at least 30g of fibre a day. Swap white carbohydrates for wholemeal carbs and leave the skins on your potatoes to make sure you're getting your GDA.
5. **Cut down on saturated fats**
Eating too many foods that are high in fat can raise the level of cholesterol (also linked with high blood pressure) in your blood. Choose leaner cuts of meat and ditch the whole milk for skimmed.
6. **Get your 5 a day**
You know the drill, eat at least 5 portions of fruit and veg a day. If you struggle try and be inventive, have some fruit on your cereal, or add extra veggies to your lovely new wholemeal pasta.
7. **Cut down on salt**
Take the salt away. Removing salt from the dinner table can reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Be careful when buying ready-made foods. A lot of the salt we have is already in the foods we buy, so pay extra attention to the food labels when you're shopping.
8. **Eat fish**
Fish are a great source of Omega-3, which does a great job at reducing the risk of heart disease. You should try and eat fish at least twice a week. And no, not from the chippy.

9. Drink less alcohol

There's hidden calories in alcohol which can have a big impact on your waistline. Try to stick to the recommendations from the NHS to reduce the risk of serious problems with your heart health.

10. Read the label

We mentioned this before, but it really is important. When shopping, pay attention to the food and drink labels. Understanding what's in your food and how it fits with the rest of your diet/lifestyle will help you make healthier choices.

Summary

It is essential that we take care of our hearts, as they are vital to our wellbeing. We should be mindful of any symptoms that may suggest a problem with our hearts, and by making healthy lifestyle choices, we can reduce the risk of serious heart-related issues.

