Risk factors for cardiovascular disease

Name: ________________________________ Hospital no: ________________________

Cardiovascular disease is the narrowing of the arteries in the body, including the coronary arteries to the heart, known as coronary heart disease. The causes have not as yet been fully established, but several risk factors have been shown to contribute to the development of the disease. It is therefore important to identify what those risks are, and to be able to take steps to reduce them.

Risk factors fall into two categories: **non-modifiable** and **modifiable**.

**Non-modifiable** risk factors are factors that cannot be altered. It is important to be aware of them if they affect you. They include:

- **Age** – risk of cardiovascular disease increases with age.
- **Family history** – if a member of your immediate family developed early onset cardiovascular disease (female relative less than 65 years old, male relative less than 55), you are at higher risk.
- **Ethnic origin** – research suggests that people of African-Caribbean and South Asian origin living in the UK may have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.
- **Gender** – men have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease at a younger age, while women may have some hormonal protection until the onset of the menopause.

**Modifiable** risk factors can be affected by changing our lifestyle or behaviour patterns, and through the administration of prescribed drugs. It is important to identify what your modifiable risk factors are so that you can take steps to reduce your risk.

**Tips for making changes**

- Don’t bite off more than you can chew – if you need to make more than one change, think about what the most important one is and make that one first.
- Think about the change you are going to make and plan carefully. If you don’t succeed at first, consider what went wrong and then try again when you are ready.
- Think about how any changes will fit in with your daily routine and how it will affect other people – is it realistic?
- Tell others about your desire to make changes and ask for their support and encouragement – enlist a ‘buddy’ if it helps.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifiable risk factor</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>Smoking damages artery walls and puts extra strain on the heart – the only safe number of cigarettes to smoke is none at all.</td>
<td>Smoking cessation referral Date:</td>
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| Cholesterol            | Cholesterol is a fatty substance which can contribute to the build-up of fatty deposits in the artery wall. **Total** cholesterol should be less than 4 mmols/L, and LDL (‘bad cholesterol’) less than 2 mmols/L. You can take steps to eat a diet that helps protect your cardiovascular system by:  
  - reducing your intake of saturated and trans fats  
  - eating two to three portions of oily fish per week  
  - increasing your fibre intake  
  - aiming for five portions of fruit and veg per day. | Next cholesterol check due:                                               |
| Obesity (a BMI of 30 or above, or central obesity) | Being the correct weight for your height is important. Your BMI (body mass index) should ideally be 20-25. People who are ‘apple’ shaped (centrally obese) are at higher risk. 
  Waist measurement should be less than 102cm/40ins for men (90cm/35ins for Asian men) and less than 88cm/34ins for women (80cm/31.5ins for Asian women). You can take steps to reduce your weight by:  
  - reducing your calorie intake (reducing amounts of high fat and high sugar foods and portion sizes)  
  - increasing your activity levels. | BMI:  
  Waist measurement:                                                    |
| Lack of physical activity/exercise | The recommendation is 30 minutes of moderate activity five days a week, e.g. a brisk walk, climbing stairs, cleaning windows, cycling. If you have not exercised for some time or have had a recent heart event, you will be advised to build up gradually. Cardiovascular rehabilitation can help to support you in becoming more active. | Blood pressure:  
  Date:                                                                 |
| High blood pressure    | People with cardiovascular disease should aim for a blood pressure reading of less than 130/80mmHg. Steps to reduce your blood pressure include:  
  - reducing salt intake  
  - sticking to guidance on alcohol – not regularly drinking more than 14 units per week and spreading this out evenly, with at least two alcohol-free days per week  
  - maintaining a healthy weight  
  - taking regular exercise. | Blood pressure:  
  Date:                                                                 |
| Diabetes               | Diabetics are at higher risk of cardiovascular disease. This risk increases if your diabetes is not well controlled. Diabetics should aim to have a blood sugar level between 4 and 7mmols/1 before mealtimes. You should liaise with your GP/diabetes nurse to discuss long-term diabetes management. | Blood pressure:  
  Date:                                                                 |
| Stress                 | Stress can affect some of the above risk factors, and so being aware of your own stress levels and how to manage stress is important. Relaxation, seeking support and exercise can all help. | Blood pressure:  
  Date:                                                                 |