

Risk factors for cardiovascular disease

Name Hospital number

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 been fully established, but several risk factors have been shown to contribute to the development of the disease. So it is very important to identify what those risks are, and to be able to take steps to reduce them.

Risk factors are in two categories: **non-modifiable** and **modifiable**.

Non-modifiable risk factors

These are things that cannot be changed. It is important to be aware of them if they affect you. They include:

- **age** – the 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

These are things that can be affected by changing our lifestyle or behaviour patterns, and by taking prescribed drugs. It is important to identify what your modifiable risk factors are so that you can take steps to reduce your risk. The table is on the next page.

Tips for making changes to your lifestyle and behaviour patterns

- Do not 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 it carefully. If you do not succeed at first, think about what went wrong and try again when you are ready.
- Think about how any changes will fit in with your daily routine and how they might affect other people. Are they realistic changes?
- Tell friends, family and colleagues about your desire to make changes, and ask for their support and encouragement. Enlist a 'buddy' (someone who could make the change with you) if it helps.

Modifiable risk factor	Target	Comment
Smoking	Smoking damages artery walls and puts extra strain on the heart. The only safe number of cigarettes to smoke is none at all.	Smoking cessation referral Date:
Cholesterol	Cholesterol is a fatty substance which contributes to the build-up of fatty deposits in the artery wall. The aim is to reduce non-HDL (bad) cholesterol by 40%. If baseline cholesterol is unknown, aim for total cholesterol ≤ 5 mm and non HDL cholesterol ≤ 3.8 . You can eat a diet that helps protect your cardiovascular system by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing your intake of saturated and trans fats • increasing your fibre intake • aiming for five portions of fruit or veg each day. 	Next check due Cholesterol result Date
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 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 help to reduce your weight by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 150 minutes (2½ hours) of moderate intensity exercise each week, such as, a brisk walk or cycling (30 minutes x 5 days every week). An alternative is a total of 75 minutes of vigorous intensity exercise each week if you have been advised that this is appropriate. If you have not exercised for some time, or have had a recent heart event, you should build up gradually. Cardiovascular rehabilitation can support you to be more active.	
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing salt intake • sticking to guidance on alcohol – not regularly drinking more than 14 units a week, and spreading this out evenly, with at least two alcohol-free days each 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 of 4-7mmols/l before mealtimes. You should liaise with your GP/diabetes nurse to discuss long-term diabetes management.	
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.	