Lowering your risk of heart attack and stroke
Welcome
to this Heart Foundation booklet

You have an important role to play in your heart health, and you can make choices today to lower your chance of having a heart attack or stroke in the future. Whether it is you or a loved one who is looking to find out more about risk, you are likely to have many questions. We hope the information in this booklet will give you some of the answers, but remember you can talk to your doctor or nurse about any questions or concerns you have as well.

**My checklist**

After reading through this booklet, you should be able to check off the following statements:

- I understand what my personal risk of heart attack and stroke means
- I understand how I can make choices to lower my risk of heart attack and stroke
- I have talked to my family, my doctor, nurse or other health professionals about the choices I have and what I might like to do
- I have checked out the Heart Foundation’s website to find more information about how to lower my risk
- I have made a plan to look after my heart health

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What is a heart attack or stroke?

- **A heart attack happens when blood stops flowing to part of your heart**

- **A stroke happens when blood stops flowing to part of your brain**

A blood clot can block an artery feeding blood to your heart, causing a heart attack, or to your brain, causing a stroke. This clot is often the result of a build-up of plaque in your arteries (called atherosclerosis). When one of these plaques ruptures, it can cause a blood clot to form and block an artery.

To learn the warning signs of a heart attack and what to do, visit [www.heartfoundation.org.nz](http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz)

Heart and diabetes checks

A ‘heart and diabetes check’ is an appointment with your doctor or nurse. Together, you will estimate your risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years, and discuss options and choices you have to protect your heart.

**What happens during a heart and diabetes check?**

Together with your doctor or nurse, you are likely to:

- Discuss any family history of heart attack or stroke
- Measure your blood pressure, height, weight and waist circumference
- Discuss your cholesterol and blood sugar levels
- Talk about anything in your life that might be increasing the chance of you having a heart attack or stroke, or developing diabetes. These things are called risk factors

Many of us don’t know whether we’re at risk of having a heart attack or stroke. A heart and diabetes check ensures we learn about our risk, and find out what steps we can take to protect our heart.

**Just because you are at ‘low risk’, doesn’t mean you are at ‘no risk’**. You may still have a heart attack or stroke even if you are at low risk. That’s why it is so important to look at the choices you can make to improve your life-long heart health.
**Risk of heart attack and stroke**

What is risk and what does it mean for me?

Your risk is an estimate of how likely you are to have a heart attack or stroke in the next five years. If you have a 10% risk, it means that if there were 100 people like you, we’d expect 10 of them to have a heart attack or stroke in the next five years.

Risk factors and overall risk

In the past, your doctor may have talked to you about each one of these risk factors separately. We now know it is better to focus on all your risk factors combined rather than just individual risk factors.

There are some risk factors you can change to help lower your risk, but there are others you can’t change.

**Risk factors you can’t change**
- Family history of heart disease
- Personal history of heart disease
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Age

**Risk factors you can change**
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Poor diet
- Not enough exercise
- Overweight
- High cholesterol

What does your overall risk look like?

Your overall risk is worked out by looking at all of your risk factors added together. It’s like building a tower out of building blocks. The risk factors are the blocks, but it’s the tower they build that is important.
When deciding what you would like to do about your risk of heart attack and stroke, it is important to consider your personal beliefs and concerns, and those of your family. You may like to think about:

- what your risk means for you and your family/whānau
- what your risk will mean for you in a few years’ time
- the pros and cons of any changes you make
- how any change you make might affect both you and your family/whānau
- who you would ask for support

Questions you may like to ask your doctor or nurse

- What’s the best thing I could do to lower my risk?
- What support is available to help me stop smoking?
- I’ve tried to make lifestyle changes before and failed – what can I do differently this time to be successful?

If you are thinking about taking natural, complementary or traditional therapies to manage your risk, please talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Making choices to lower your risk

You have an important role to play in your health.

No matter how high or how low your risk of heart attack or stroke, there are always choices you can make to lower your risk.

The choices you make every day can change your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Choices you can make to lower your risk of heart attack & stroke

Stop smoking  Make heart healthy eating and drinking choices  Move more  Lose weight  Take medications

Even small changes have a positive effect on your risk factors and your overall risk of heart attack and stroke.

Making one small change that you’re able to stick to is more valuable than making a big change that’s hard to stick to. As you get comfortable with one small change, you may like to add another one. Slowly you can start building sustainable, healthier habits.

Note: The choices you make to lower your risk of heart attack and stroke will also help you manage high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes.
Choices you have to manage your risk

Stop smoking

If you smoke, stopping smoking is the best thing you can do for your heart.

There is lots of support available to help you stop smoking. Talk to your doctor or nurse about what support may work best for you.

Phone Quitline on 0800 778 778 or visit www.quit.org.nz for more information about support to stop smoking

Tips:

• It’s much easier to stop smoking when you have support from family/whānau – who can you ask to help you?
• Nicotine cravings last for three minutes, so you only need to hold out for 180 seconds to beat the urge to smoke

My next step is:

Add one piece of fruit to breakfast or lunch
Add one more vege to dinner
Switch to lite blue, green or yellow top milk
Swap from white bread to wholegrain
Cut the fat off meat and skin off chicken
Swap from butter or ghee to oils or margarine

Healthier eating can be easy. Why not start by taking one simple step?

Goal: To have stopped smoking by your next birthday

Tip:

Check out our healthy heart visual food guide and meal planner app at www.heartfoundation.org.nz

Goal: To follow a heart healthy eating and drinking pattern throughout the week
Choose your have to manage your risk

Getting active can be simple. Why not try one of these ideas each day?

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Deliver a message in person to a co-worker instead of sending an email
- Get off the bus one stop early and walk
- Catch up with friends during a walk instead of by phone
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about a green prescription
- Turn up the music and dance while doing household chores

**Tip:**
When doing moderate exercise, you should be able to feel your heart pumping harder but still be able to talk comfortably.
- If you are too breathless to talk, then it’s time to slow down
- If you are able to sing or whistle, then step up the pace

**My next step is:**
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________

**Goal:** Work towards doing 2.5 hours of moderate exercise spread throughout the week

There are steps you can start taking today to manage your weight. It’s all about balancing what you eat and drink with the exercise that you do.

- Use a small plate rather than a big one
- Swap a can of fizzy to water
- Keep a food diary to help you keep on track
- Cut down on alcohol
- Try walking or biking to work rather than driving
- For more ideas, check out the ‘heart healthy eating’ and ‘moving more’ pages

**Tips:**
- If you’re feeling hungry, have a glass of water first. Often we can mistake the feeling of thirst for hunger
- Listen to your stomach, not your eyes, for when it’s time to stop eating

**My next step is:**
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________

**Goal:** If overweight, aim to lose 5 - 10% of your body weight
To keep safe when taking medication, you need to understand:

- what the medication does
- why you are on the medication
- which unwanted effects you should look out for

Feeling uncomfortable?
If you have questions or concerns about your medications or if you have any unwanted side effects, please talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. There may be other medications available that would suit you better.

**Tips:**
When taking medication, it’s important to take it regularly. You may like to:
- Set reminders on your cellphone
- Talk to your pharmacist about a blister pack

**My next step is:**
Goal: To understand any medication you are on and why you are taking it

**Watch and wait**
Risk means something different to everyone.

You may decide you’d like to simply monitor your health for a while. Then, if your health or life changes in any way, you might decide at a later date to start taking steps to lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.

If you decide to take a ‘watch and wait’ approach, you won’t have to make any lifestyle changes or remember to take any medication. You also won’t have any side effects or complications. However, you will need to monitor your health, which may mean extra visits to the doctor.

Making a lifestyle change can help improve your overall health and wellbeing, and lower your risk of other illnesses. If you decide to watch and wait, you will miss out on these benefits.

Over time, it is likely that without treatment or making lifestyle changes, your risk of heart attack or stroke will increase. Please think about what this may mean for you and your family/whānau.

**Tips:**
- Schedule a regular check-up with your doctor or nurse to monitor your health
- Learn the warning signs and symptoms of a heart attack and stroke so you can react quickly

**My next step is:**
For more about making choices to manage your risk, visit [www.heartfoundation.org.nz](http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz)
Your personal plan for heart health

**You have an important role to play in your health**

After reading through this section, there may be one or more things you’d like to do to lower your chance of having a heart attack or stroke. Have a conversation with your doctor or nurse about any changes you’re thinking about. The first step is deciding if you are ready to make this change.

### Reasons to stay the same

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is good about staying the same?</th>
<th>What worries me about staying the same?</th>
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</table>

### Reasons to make change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What worries me about making a change?</th>
<th>What is good about making a change?</th>
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</table>

Based on your answers to the questions above, how important is it to you to make a change?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
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If making a change is less important to you than a 7, try finding a more important change that you would like to make.

### Recruiting help from friends and family/whānau

A key step in making a successful change is to get the support of your friends or family. Together with your support team, think about what steps you can take to manage your risk.

Your support team has two important tasks:

1. Ask questions to find out how they can support you to make your change
2. Provide emotional support

### People on my support team:

- [ ]

Another important step is to make a plan. Carefully monitoring your progress against your targets each day will really help you to succeed.

Make sure that you set **SMART** goals. This means your goals should be:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic, and have a
- **T**ime-frame

### My goal is:

- [ ]

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16
Choosing my targets

Break your goal down into small, achievable steps. We’ll call these your ‘targets’.
Set targets that are simple and realistic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My target is:</th>
<th>Make it detailed</th>
<th>Set a time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember to keep these achievable</td>
<td>How much?</td>
<td>How long for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: <em>Walk my kids to school and back.</em></td>
<td>Example: Twice a week</td>
<td>for 20 minutes.</td>
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On a scale of 1 to 10, **how confident** are you that you can achieve this target?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not confident → Very confident

If you are less confident than a 7, think about starting with something easier. Set small, achievable targets.

Discuss your plan with your support team and doctor or nurse so they know how to support you.
## My daily progress

Keep track of how much effort it takes you to achieve your target(s) by marking down a score (see scale to the right) every day this week.

### My plan for this week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 6</th>
<th>Day 7</th>
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### My daily effort scores

![Score Scale]

Too easy

Too hard

## Check your progress

After your first week, look at your plan and see how much effort it took to achieve your targets.

Ideally, you should be aiming for about a 5 for effort, so if you’re finding your targets too hard or too easy then change them to make them right for you.
Heart Attack Warning Signs

**ARE YOU EXPERIENCING...**

**HEAVINESS**

**PRESSURE**

**DISCOMFORT / PAIN**

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In ANY of these areas:

- CHEST
- SHOULDER
- JAW
- ARM
- NECK
- BACK (PAIN IN MID BACK)

You may also experience:

- SWEATING
- SHORTNESS OF BREATH
- NAUSEA
- FATIGUE
- DIZZINESS

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**YES**

1. STOP
2. **02** 15 **STOP**
3. **03**

Stop and rest now. Tell someone how you feel.

If you take angina medication and the symptoms have not been relieved within 15 minutes or if the symptoms are severe or getting worse.

Call 111 and ask for an ambulance. If instructed and aspirin is available, chew one.

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**Stroke warning signs**

If you see any of these signs, call 111 immediately. Getting help fast means a better chance of recovery.

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Visit [www.heartfoundation.org.nz](http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz) and search 'my weekly record sheets' for weekly goal setting plans, or talk to your health professional about getting a copy of the full 'Taking control' resource.

After your first week, you may like to keep the target you have already so that it becomes easier or a habit, or you may like to add a new target.

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**Visit www.heartfoundation.org.nz** and search 'my weekly record sheets' for weekly goal setting plans, or talk to your health professional about getting a copy of the full ‘Taking control’ resource.
Hearts fit for life, for this generation and the next

The Heart Foundation is the charity that works to stop New Zealanders dying prematurely from heart disease and help people with heart disease to live full and productive lives. We are committed to achieving that vision through better support, care, research and prevention.

We cannot continue our vital work without the generous support of donors and volunteers.

If you would like to join us in ensuring better heart health for you, me and our loved ones, please consider donating by:

Visiting www.heartfoundation.org.nz/donate

Phoning 0800 830 100