

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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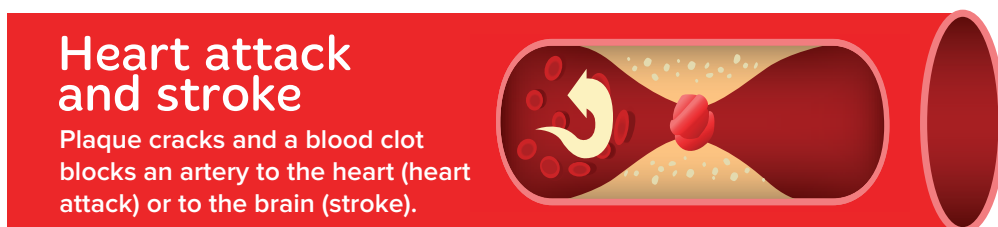
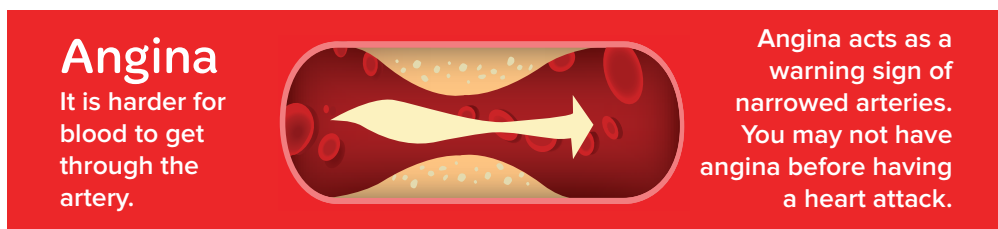
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Heart attack and stroke

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 coronary artery disease). When one of these plaques ruptures, it can cause a blood clot to form, and block an artery.



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 and weight
- 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.



To learn the warning signs of a heart attack and what to do, take our heart attack warning signs quiz
heartfoundation.org.nz/quiz

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.

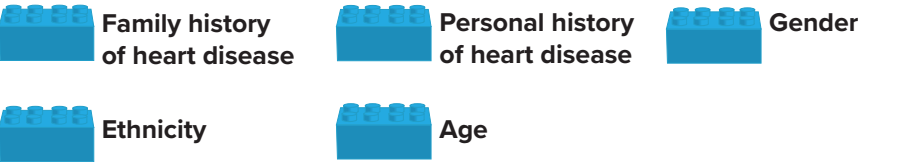


Risk factors and overall risk

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



Risk factors you can change



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.

Choices you have to manage your risk

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.

Stop smoking

Becoming smokefree is the best thing you can do for your heart.



You are more likely to successfully stop smoking if you get help. Using stop smoking services and medications can double your chances of being smokefree in the long-term. Talk to your doctor or nurse or pharmacist about what support may work best for you.



Phone, online and text-to-quit



Local one-on-one or group support programme



Patches, lozenges and/or gum



Other medications

What about e-cigarettes?

Current research suggests vaping (or using e-cigarettes) is a less harmful alternative than conventional cigarettes and can help you quit.

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:



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

Make heart healthy eating and drinking choices

Heart healthy eating is all about balancing the different types of food you eat to get a range of nutrients. Try balancing your day's eating like this:



CUT BACK ON junk foods, takeaways & foods or drinks high in sugar, salt or saturated & trans fats

Follow these simple steps to help you make realistic changes to what you eat and to improve your heart health.

- 1 Share and enjoy meals with family and friends that focus mostly on whole and less-processed foods.
- 2 Include plenty of colourful non-starchy vegetables* and/or fruit at every meal and for most snacks.
- 3 Choose whole grains in place of refined grain products e.g. choose brown rice instead of white rice.
- 4 Use legumes like chickpeas, kidney beans, black beans and lentils in place of meat or mix into a dish and use less meat.
- 5 Include fresh or canned oily fish like mackerel, sardines and salmon a couple of times a week.
- 6 Use mostly reduced or low-fat milk, cheese and yoghurt (or calcium-rich alternatives) everyday.
- 7 Choose healthy oils, nuts and seeds instead of animal and coconut fats.
- 8 Drink water to quench thirst, and limit sugary drinks and alcohol.
- 9 When preparing meals, snacks and drinks, use pepper, herbs, spices or fruit to add flavour rather than using salt or sugar.

*Does not include starchy vegetables like potatoes, Māori potatoes, kūmara, corn, parsnip, yams, cassava/tapioca, green banana and taro.



Goal: To follow a heart healthy eating and drinking pattern throughout the week.

Lose weight

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.

Move more

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



Take the stairs instead of the elevator



Get off the bus one stop early and walk



Talk to your doctor or nurse about a green prescription



Deliver a message in person to a co-worker instead of sending an email



Catch up with friends during a walk instead of by phone



Get in the pool and try walking in water

Tip:

When doing moderate exercise, you should 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 up to doing 2.5 hours of moderate exercise over a week.

Take medications

Even if you start making some lifestyle changes, your doctor may still like to talk to you about medications.



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 heartfoundation.org.nz.

Making a 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.

There will be many things going on in your day-to-day life which:

- will affect your health
- may make it hard to make lifestyle changes
- may be more important or worrying for you at the moment than your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Circle areas of the 'wheel' below to help you identify where to focus your energy and set a goal for change.



What area of the wheel do you want to tackle first?

How important is it to you to make a change in this area?



If making a change is less important to you than a 7, try finding a more important change that you would like to make.

Try setting a SMART goal. This means what you want to do should be:

- S

pecific
- M

easurable
- A

chievable
- R

ealistic, and have a
- T

ime-frame

My SMART goal is:

What small steps will you take to achieve this goal?

These will be your targets. Make them detailed, and make them SMART.

How sure are you that you can do this?



If it is less than 7, think about what it would take to increase your confidence, or think about starting with a smaller step.

Who could help you to achieve your goal?

For example, your family/whānau may want to make changes with you.

What other support would help you achieve your goal?

For example, community support groups, dietitian.

What might get in the way of you achieving your goal?

How will you overcome these problems?

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 week 1

Goal	Target	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

My plan for week 2

Goal	Target	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

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, spend more time working to achieve them. If you're finding them too easy, increase your target by doing it for longer, doing it more often, or adding a new goal or target.

Remember to reward yourself if you have achieved your targets, and keep going.

Use a notebook, and keep monitoring your progress for the next few weeks until you reach your goal.



Action plans

Stroke warning signs

**AT ANY SIGN OF STROKE
CALL 111**

F A S T

FACE DROOPING ON ONE SIDE
ARM WEAKNESS ON ONE SIDE
SPEECH MIXED UP, SLURRED OR LOST
TAKE ACTION CALL 111 IMMEDIATELY

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

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and the Health Promotion Agency

ANGINA ACTION PLAN

01 5 min

- ▶ If you are having angina symptoms, stop what you are doing and rest now
- ▶ Tell someone how you are feeling
- ▶ Take 1 puff of your GTN spray

02 5 min

- ▶ If you still have symptoms after 5 mins, take 1 more puff of your GTN spray

03

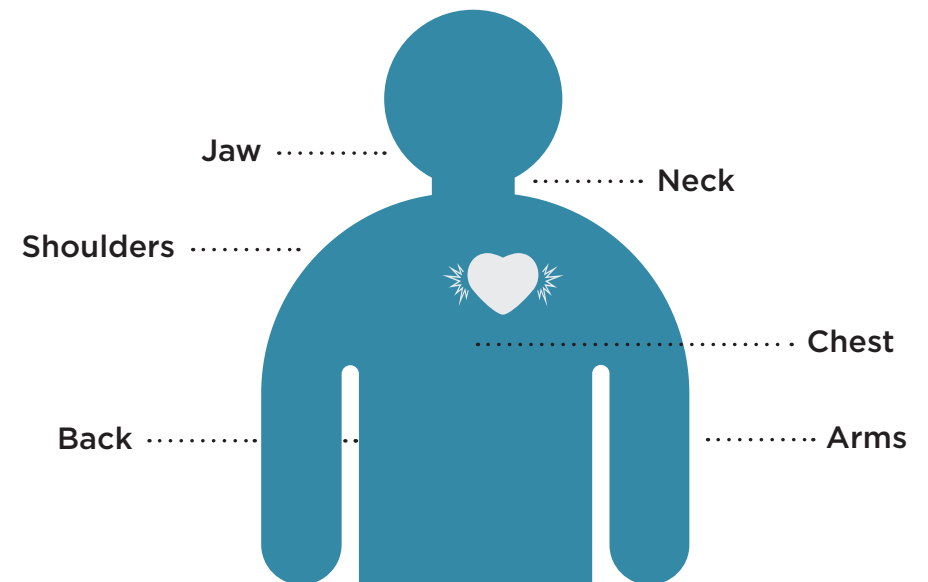
- ▶ If you still have symptoms after another 5 minutes, treat it as a heart attack - dial 111 and ask for an ambulance
- ▶ Chew an aspirin if advised by a paramedic

If your symptoms go away, you can resume your activities gently
IMPORTANT - if your angina becomes more frequent, severe, lasts longer or happens when you are doing very little or resting, see your doctor in the next 24 hours

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Heart attack warning signs

Pain, discomfort, pressure, tightness or heaviness in any of these areas:



You may also feel:



If you have any of these symptoms for more than 10 minutes, you may be having a heart attack.

Call 111 and ask for an ambulance.

Hearts fit for life

The Heart Foundation is the charity that works to stop all people in New Zealand dying prematurely from heart disease and enable people with heart disease to live full lives.

Visit our website **heartfoundation.org.nz** to find out how to:

- join information and support sessions
- share your story
- ask questions.

To speak with a nurse about your condition, call our Heart Helpline 0800 863 375.

If you would like to assist us to help other people like yourself, please consider donating

To donate:

Visit: heartfoundation.org.nz/donate

Phone: 0800 830 100

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Information correct at time of printing.

The Heart Foundation of New Zealand is a registered charity (CC23052) under the Charities Act 2005



As a charity, we thank our generous donors for helping bring this resource to life.

