

Dealing with heart disease.

With around 7.4 million Britons diagnosed with heart and circulatory disease in the UK, and more who are unaware they have the condition, heart disease is something that's likely to touch our lives at some point. This factsheet looks at life with heart disease, dealing with a diagnosis and managing the condition.



Heart disease: facts and figures

Heart disease is an umbrella term which applies to a number of heart and circulatory conditions, including:

- coronary heart disease
- arrhythmia
- aortic disease
- congenital heart disease

According to statistics produced by the British Heart Foundation, 2.3 million people live with coronary heart disease in the UK and 1.4 million people have survived a heart attack.

Thanks to medical advances, research and the work of organisations like the British Heart Foundation, the survival rates for people living with serious heart conditions have dramatically improved.

Diagnosing heart disease

For all the people living with a known heart condition in the UK, there are considerable numbers of individuals who have undiagnosed heart problems.

If you are experiencing symptoms of heart disease, including chest pain, numbness in your limbs or dizziness, you should tell your GP.

Your GP will arrange for you to have diagnostic tests to investigate the cause of your symptoms.

These tests could include:

- blood test to measure your cholesterol
- coronary angiogram
- electrocardiogram (ECG)
- MRI scan
- cardiac CT scan

Dealing with your diagnosis

You may receive a diagnosis of heart disease because you've experienced symptoms or after suffering an acute event like a heart attack. Whatever the circumstances, being diagnosed with a heart condition will take some adjustment. You may experience emotional distress as a result of your new physical reality, and there will be physical symptoms to manage as well as lifestyle changes to make.

Depending on your needs, support is available to help you get through your diagnosis and any physical trauma you have experienced. If you are recovering from a heart attack, cardiac rehabilitation services will deal with any follow-up care you need.

Adapting your lifestyle

You will need time to adjust to living your new normal. Take one day at a time, build in rest periods, and don't put too much pressure on yourself.

Your GP or consultant will advise you on lifestyle changes you may need to make relating to your diet, exercise, and daily routine.

For example, you may be advised not to lift what you normally would, or adjustments may have to be made relating to your usual tasks at work. Planning what you need to do in advance is a good idea and try not to rush around. Avoiding unnecessary stress is important if you have been diagnosed with heart disease.

Managing with medication

Your heart disease may be managed with medication – this will usually be to reduce your blood pressure or widen your arteries.

If you have high cholesterol, you may be prescribed statins to manage the condition.

Nitrates are prescribed to help widen blood vessels and come in spray, tablet or patch form.

It's really important to take your medication correctly. Set an alarm or ask a family member if you need help to remember when to take it.



Things you used to do every day may be harder and you might have to adapt to a new normality.

British Heart Foundation