Keep your heart healthy

How to look after your heart

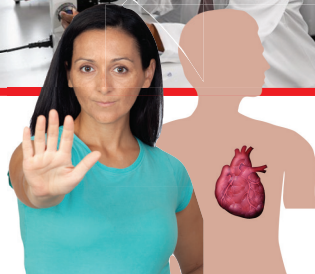# Contents   Page

About us

We are the British Heart Foundation.

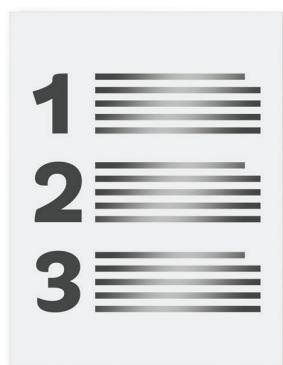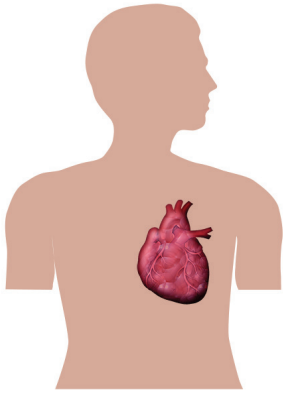We work with doctors and scientists to find treatments for heart problems.

We want to learn how to treat heart problems and stop them from happening.

We have lots of information and support to help keep your heart healthy. This booklet tells you:
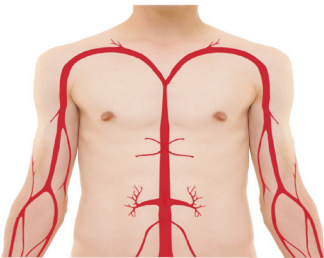
- what is heart disease

- who is more at risk of getting heart disease

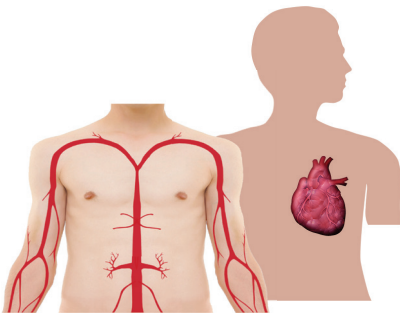- things you can do to keep your heart healthy.
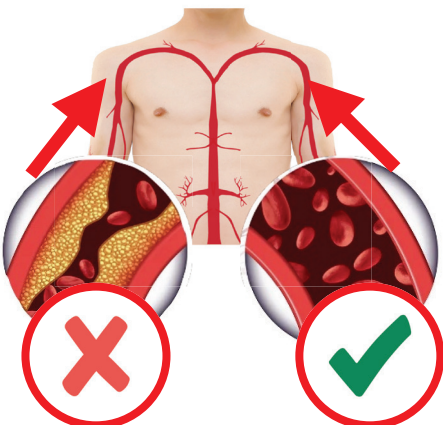
What is heart disease

Your heart is really important.
It pumps blood around your body
to keep you alive.

Blood goes to and from your heart in
small tubes called **arteries**.

Heart disease is a health problem
that affects your heart and arteries.

It can happen when your arteries get
blocked by too much fat sticking to
the wall of your artery.

2
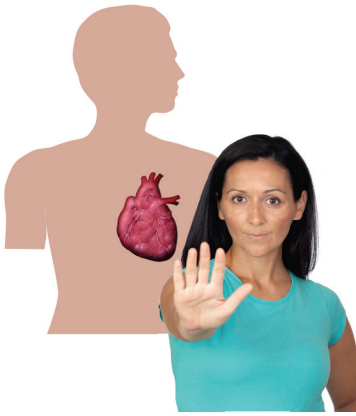
If your arteries get blocked or damaged, your heart cannot work properly. It has to work harder to pump blood around your body.

If this happens in the arteries in your heart or brain, it is very serious.

It can cause problems like a heart attack or a stroke.

These can cause people to be very poorly or sadly die.

It is really important to try to protect yourself from heart disease.

Who is at risk of heart disease

Anyone can have heart disease. You might be more at risk if you have 1 of these health conditions:

Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is a condition that causes too much sugar in your blood.
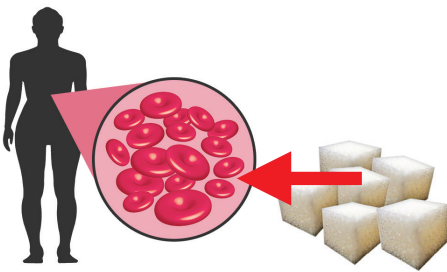
This happens when your body does not make enough **insulin**. Our bodies need insulin to turn sugar into energy.

Too much sugar in your blood can damage your arteries.

Over time, this can cause heart disease.

High blood pressure

This is when the pressure in your arteries is higher than it should be.

Your heart has to work extra hard to pump blood around your body.

High cholesterol
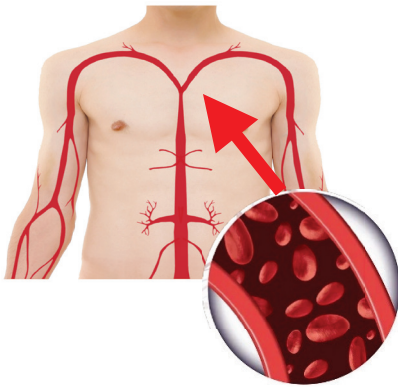
We say cholesterol like this:
kol est er rol. Cholesterol is a type of fat that moves around in your blood.
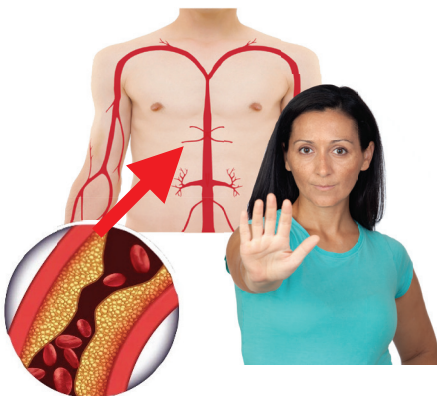
You need some types of cholesterol but too much is bad for you.

Too much cholesterol can narrow your arteries and make it harder for the blood to move through.

If you have high cholesterol, you are at more risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

You also have more chance of having heart disease if you:

- smoke

- drink too much alcohol

- do not move enough

- eat an unhealthy **diet**. Your **diet** is things you eat and drink

- weigh too much

- feel stressed a lot.

Things you can do to keep your heart healthy

There are lots of small changes you can make to keep your heart healthy.

They will make a big difference.

1. Eat well

It is really important to eat and drink the right things.

Having a healthy diet helps to keep your heart healthy.

Eat healthy foods

Your body will work best if you eat lots of healthy foods.

Things like:

● fruits and vegetables

● **wholegrain foods**

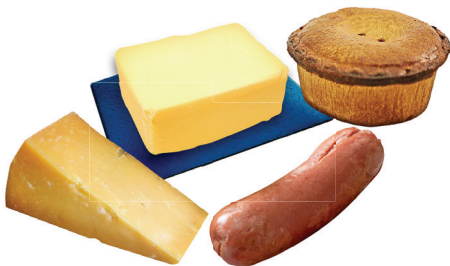This is things like brown bread, rice and pasta. Brown bread is also called wholemeal bread

● some protein. Protein helps to keep your body strong and healthy.

It is in things like chicken, fish, eggs and nuts.

Eat less fat and sugar

Some types of fat are bad for you. This is fat that is in things like sausages, bacon, butter and pastry.

Sugar is in things like sugary drinks, cake, sweets and chocolate.

Too much fat and sugar can make you put on weight.

This gives you more chance of having heart disease.

We do need foods with a small amount of fat and sugar. It helps our bodies to work properly.

You should try to eat healthy fats and sugar instead.

Healthy fats and sugar are in foods like avocados, nuts, fruit and yoghurt.

You should drink water or have diet or sugar free drinks.

Eat less salt

Most of the salt we eat comes in the food we buy.

Too much salt can cause high blood pressure and make you poorly.
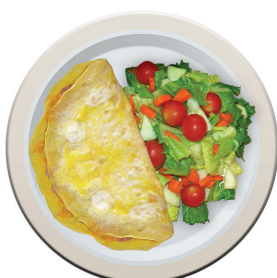
You could use herbs and spices instead of salt.

Eat the right amount of food

A healthy diet is not just what you eat, but how much you eat.

The amount of each type of food you eat at 1 time is called a **portion**.

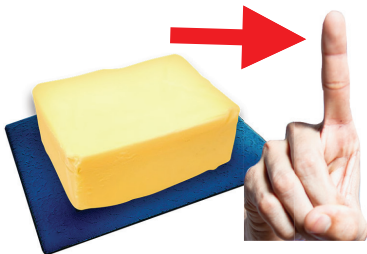You can use your hand to work out how big a portion should be:

● your fist is a portion of things like bread, pasta or rice

● your cupped hands is a portion of fruit or vegetables

● your palm is a portion of fish or meat

● your fingertip is a portion of butter

● 2 fingers together is a portion of cheese.

You should make sure you eat the right size portions. This will help to keep you at a healthy weight.
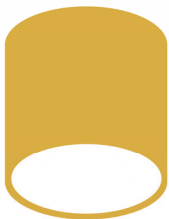
11

Look at food labels

Food labels should tell you what size a portion is.

Labels also tell you how much salt, fat or sugar is in the food or drink. Food labels have colour signs on them.
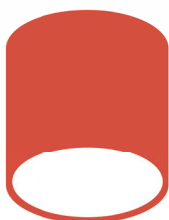
A **green** sign means there is not much of that thing in it. So if a label has green for sugar, there is not much sugar in it.

A **yellow** sign means there might be more of something in it. So if a label has yellow for fat, there is a bit more fat in it.

A **red sign** means there is a lot of the thing in it. So if a label has red for salt, there is a lot of salt in it.

12

Some foods might have a mix of red, yellow and green signs on the label.

If a food has mostly:

- 🔴 **green** labels then it is good for you. You should try to eat lots of foods with green food labels if you can

- 🔴 **yellow** labels then it is ok for you but you should not have too much of it

- 🔴 **red** labels then it is bad for you. You should not eat this food too often.

2. Manage your weight

You should weigh yourself to make sure you stay at a healthy weight.

It is best to only weigh yourself once a week.

Weighing too much can cause lots of health problems.

If you need to lose weight, you should try to eat a healthy diet and get more exercise.

14

3. Manage stress

Most people feel stressed sometimes. Being stressed does not cause heart disease.

But it can cause you to do things that are bad for your health.

Things like drinking alcohol or smoking a lot.

You might also find it harder to relax and take a break.

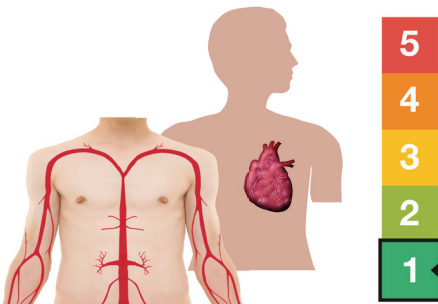It is important to manage your stress to stay healthy.

15

4. Stop smoking

Giving up smoking is the best thing you can do for your health.

If you smoke, you should try to stop as soon as possible.

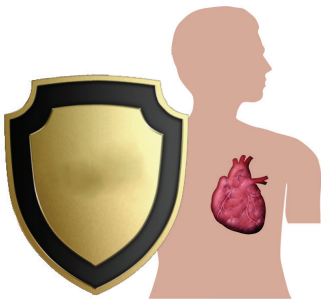You have less chance of heart disease as soon as you stop smoking.

After 1 year of not smoking, your chance of having a heart attack goes down by half.

5. Drink less alcohol

It is best not to drink alcohol at all, if you can.

But drinking less alcohol is still an important way to protect your heart and health.

Drinks like wine and beer have alcohol in them.

Alcohol

We say that the amount of alcohol in a drink is called a **unit**.

You should try not to drink more than **14 units of alcohol** in a week.

14 units is the same as:

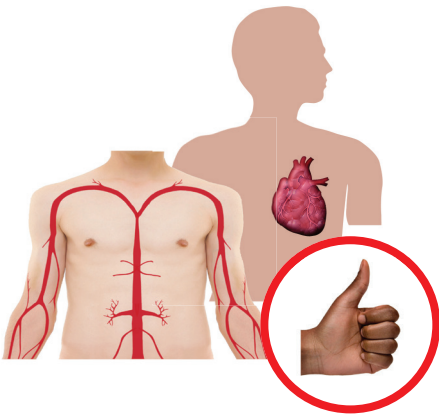🔴 6 pints of beer

or

🔴 6 small glasses of wine.

You should also try to have some days every week when you do not drink alcohol.

6. Move more

Moving about is good for your body and mind. Moving about can also be called **being active**.

Being active is one of the best things you can do for your health.

It is good for your heart and helps to control your blood pressure.

You do not need to go to the gym or run a big race.

You can do things you enjoy. Things like walking, dancing, or gardening.

Being active can be anything that makes you:

● breathe harder

● feel warmer

● feel like your heart is beating faster.

You should try to be active for 20 to 30 minutes every day.

You do not have to do it all at once.

You could be active for 10 minutes then do a bit more later on.

Contact us

If you have any questions or are worried about heart disease, you can contact us.

You can speak to one of our nurses on our Heart Helpline.

Phone

0808 802 1234

Our Helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

It is free to call the helpline.

British Heart
Foundation

This booklet has been supported by Royal Mail in partnership
with British Heart Foundation

Easy read written by Easy Read UK