

A Guide to Heart Health.

September is Heart Health Month. Over a quarter of all deaths are caused by cardiovascular diseases. These are often linked to genetics, but the majority can be avoided through the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

A Healthy Heart Exercise Regime.

Exercise can drastically improve your heart health, but what type of exercise is best for you? There is no one go-to exercise that combats heart disease, but combination of the below can help – especially those you enjoy doing!

- Aerobic exercise such as walking, running, swimming and cycling are highly beneficial for someone who may suffer with any heart issues as it improves circulation, which in turn lowers blood pressure and heart rate.
- Strength or resistance training has been shown to reduce the risk of a heart attack or stroke. However, if you are someone that is living with a heart disease, it would be advisable to consult your doctor first.
- Stretching and flexibility-related exercises do not directly affect heart health, but they do contribute to musculoskeletal health, which enables you to do aerobic and resistance training, and thus decrease the risk of heart disease. Stretching exercises such as yoga can contribute to a reduction in stress, in turn reducing pressure on the heart.

A Healthy Heart Diet.

A healthy and consistent eating pattern can help improve heart health. Fueling your body benefits both your heart and overall health.

- Adding fruit and vegetables into your diet is a great way to increase your vitamin intake.
- Don't be afraid of eating carbohydrates, but do try and choose the wholegrain or complex options such as oats, quinoa, brown rice, and wholegrain pasta.
- Choose fats that are high in Omega-3 and Omega-6, like nuts, avocado, fish and seeds.
- Make an effort to limit the amount of oils/salt you use when cooking. Swapping out salt for herbs and spices can drastically reduce your salt intake whilst improving taste!





Cut out smoking!

We are all well aware that smoking is extremely damaging to heart health, with over 80% of smokers losing their lives to heart-related illnesses. However, knowing this does not make quitting any easier. Quitting smoking requires determination, willpower and support. Below are a few tips on how to give up:

- Set a date to stop.
- Support is key. This can be from friends or family, or from a source such as a 'Quit Plan' from the HSE or NHS.
- Prepare your surroundings, and ensure any cigarettes in your home are thrown out.
- Prepare to change your routine. In the times that you would normally smoke, find something else to do, such as a walk, time to make a tea, or a similar activity that you enjoy.
- Use the money you've saved from not smoking to buy yourself a weekly/monthly reward. Setting a financial goal through the savings you've made from quitting is a great incentive.
- You will come across difficult times. Remember that they are temporary and will pass, and that the beauty is in the challenge.

Tackle Stress.

Studies suggest that the high levels of cortisol from long-term stress can increase blood cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar, and blood pressure. The body responds to stress in a variety of ways ranging from back pain, headache and stomach aches to a loss in energy, a change in sleep patterns and mood swings. It's important to keep an eye out for any of these signs and address them accordingly.

- If you are under pressure or stressed, utilise your Employee Assistance Programme to chat to an experienced fully accredited counsellor.
- Exercise is an excellent stress-reliever. Even taking a short walk has been proven by research to improve your mood.
- Talk to a friend or family member. A problem shared, is a problem halved.
- Write down how you're feeling, this can create a sense of release of cortisol, the stress hormone.

