

Preventing Heart Disease



Coronary heart disease (CHD) is a major cause of death in Ireland and worldwide. Approximately 10,000 people die in Ireland from CHD each year, accounting for around 36% of deaths each year. That's despite the fact that up to 80% of all heart disease is considered preventable through reducing risk factors and making some lifestyle changes. This article offers guidelines on preventing heart disease.

Symptoms of coronary heart disease

The main symptoms of CHD are:

- shortness of breath
- chest pain (angina)
- palpitations
- heart attacks
- heart failure

Not everyone has the same symptoms and some people may not have any before CHD is diagnosed.

What is coronary heart disease

Coronary heart disease is when your heart's blood supply is compromised by narrowing's or blockages in your heart blood vessels. This is commonly caused by a build-up of fatty deposits in the coronary arteries. Over time, the walls of your arteries can become blocked with these fatty substances. This process is referred to as atherosclerosis and the fatty deposits are called atheroma or plaques.

Atherosclerosis can be caused by lifestyle factors and other conditions, such as:

- smoking
- high cholesterol
- diabetes
- hypertension (high blood pressure)

Preventing coronary heart disease

There are several ways that you can help to reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD), these include reducing your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. There are a number of ways you can do this, including:

Eat a healthy and balanced diet

- A low-fat, high-fibre diet is recommended, including plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables (five portions a day) and whole grains.
- Limit the amount of salt that you eat to no more than 6g (0.2oz) a day because too much salt will increase your blood pressure. Six grams of salt is about one teaspoonful.
- Avoid food containing saturated fats because these will increase your cholesterol levels. Examples of foods that are high in saturated fat include:
 - cakes and biscuits
 - sausages and fatty meats
 - pies
 - butter, lard, cream and hard cheese
 - foods that contain coconut or palm oil
- A balanced diet should however contain a small amount of unsaturated fat, which help to reduce bad cholesterol. Foods's high in unsaturated fat include:
 - avocados
 - seeds and nuts
 - oily fish
 - sunflower, rapeseed, olive and vegetable oils

Physical activity and weight management

Combining a healthy diet with regular exercise is the best way to obtain and maintain a healthy weight. Maintaining a healthy weight lowers your chances of developing high blood pressure.

Regular exercise will make your heart and blood circulatory system more efficient,

it will lower your cholesterol level, and also keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

The heart is a muscle and like any other muscle it benefits from exercise. A strong heart can pump more blood around your body with less effort. Any aerobic exercise, e.g., walking, swimming, even dancing, makes your heart work harder and keeps it healthy.

The HSE recommends that adults should exercise at least 30 minutes a day for moderate intensity activity, five days a week (www.hse.ie).

Give up smoking

Smoking is a major risk factor for developing atherosclerosis hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). If you give up smoking you will reduce your risk of developing CHD.

Reduce your alcohol consumption

The recommended weekly limit of alcohol consumption for men is twenty-one standard drinks and for women fourteen standard drinks. If you are going to drink then keep within the recommended guidelines and avoid binge drinking.

Keep your blood pressure under control

Have your blood pressure checked by your GP regularly. Your target blood pressure should be below 140/85mmHg.

Keep your diabetes under control

You can reduce your chances of developing type 2 diabetes by being physically active, controlling your weight, and keeping your blood pressure under control. If you have diabetes, these three things will also help you to keep control of your blood sugar level.

Take any medication that is prescribed for you

If you have CHD, you may be prescribed medication to help relieve your symptoms and stop further problems developing.

If you are prescribed medication, it is vital that you take it and follow the correct dosage. Do not stop taking your medication without consulting your doctor first, as doing so is likely to make your symptoms worse and put your health at risk.

For further information on CHD and preventing it visit:

- www2.hse.ie
- www.irishheart.ie

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