



Diving and the heart

Heart information sheets

What happens to the body when under water?

Immersion in water causes the blood to redistribute itself around the body causing physiological changes such as a change in pressure in the chest and in the brain. The effects of these are greater, the deeper you dive. When the water is colder than body temperature, as in the sea, these changes are even greater. In some cases they can include reduced heart rate and increased blood pressure.

What conditions will disqualify me from diving?

As a general rule, any condition that causes a significantly increased risk of incapacity when in or under water will disqualify a person from diving. People affected by abnormal heart rhythms, valve replacements, pacemakers, high blood pressure and congenital heart defects need to take their conditions into account. If you have any of these conditions and you are thinking of joining a diving club, it is important that you speak to your doctor first. He or she will be able to assess your ability to dive.

Will I need a medical certificate?

In order to enjoy diving as a recreational activity, a certificate of medical fitness is required. This certificate is valid for 12 months and must be issued by a medical examiner. The applicant will first need to undergo an assessment, which includes a cardiovascular check-up.

Further information

Guidelines for amateur divers are issued by the **United Kingdom Sport Diving Medical Committee (UKSDMC)**.

Visit www.uksdmc.co.uk for more information and to find out how you can contact your local medical referee.

The British Sub Aqua Club

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The British Heart Foundation is the nation's heart charity, saving lives through pioneering research, vital information and patient care. But we need your help – we rely on donations of time or money to continue our life-saving work. If you'd like to help or find out more, visit bhf.org.uk

 Heart Helpline
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bhf.org.uk