

Summary sheet 6

Making changes



What can you change to improve your heart health?

You can change the modifiable risk factors for coronary heart disease:

- smoking (see Summary sheet 10)
- high blood pressure (see Summary sheet 7)
- high blood cholesterol (see Summary sheet 12b)
- physical inactivity (see Summary sheet 8)
- being overweight (see Summary sheet 13)
- diabetes (see Summary sheet 11 part a and b)

How can people make successful lifestyle changes and who can help?

They need to *want* to make the change. If the person doesn't want to change their lifestyle, no-one can make them do so.

There needs to *be* a change. For example, a person trying to eat more healthily needs to clear out their high fat, salt and sugar foods and replace them with healthy foods.

The lifestyle change must *continue over time*. The change needs to become part of everyday life. For example, a person trying to get more active by walking to work needs to continue doing so every day.

The lifestyle being changed *cannot be a way of coping*. For example, if someone smokes when they are stressed, they need to replace this habit with another coping mechanism, such as chewing sugar-free gum.

Their life should not be *uncertain when they are making the change*. For example, if someone is having a challenging time – such as moving house – it is probably not the best time to make a change.

The person needs *social support*. This can be from friends, family and health professionals. The person needs to identify who they will get support from and let those people know about the change they plan to make, so that they know how to provide support.

Lifestyle changes can be challenging at first, but over time you will notice the benefit to your health and wellbeing. You can get help from:

- dietitians
- physical activity instructors
- smoking cessation advisors
- health advocates
- the BHF Heart Helpline

What can help?

Don't be discouraged if you feel you can only manage one small change at a time. Set yourself a goal and make a plan to help you achieve it. For example, you could plan to go swimming three times a week. But if your time is limited, you could start by going once a week and aim to work up to two, then three, days over time. Keep your goals **specific, realistic** and **manageable** – you'll find them easier to achieve.

Specific – make your goal straightforward and write down what you want to achieve. You can break a large goal into smaller ones to achieve it.

Measurable – a measurable goal is saying, "I want to swim twice a week for 30 minutes". An unmeasurable goal is saying "I want to swim more".

Realistic – this doesn't mean making your goal too easy, it means not setting yourself a goal that's too difficult to fit into your daily life. If you aim too high, you are setting yourself up for failure. If you get the balance right, you will have a real sense of achievement when you reach your goal.

Are there any tips to help you achieve your goal?

1. Commit to your goal, plan, get enough support, and consider what difficulties you may face and the rewards you might give yourself. For example, buy yourself a treat with the money you save by not using the car for very short journeys. Write it all down. Review your goal regularly and think about how you are doing.
2. Tell as many people as you can what you are doing as they can support you – and it makes it harder for you not to stick to your plan!
3. When you have achieved your goal, think about setting a new one.
4. If you're not achieving your goal, **don't give up**. Review your plan or get further advice and support from a health professional – for example, your practice nurse or GP, or call the BHF Heart HelpLine.
5. Remember to review all of your modifiable risk factors regularly, as you may feel ready to make changes to another modifiable risk factor at a later date.

For more information

BHF services:

Heart Matters is a free service designed for anyone who has, or is at risk of developing, a heart condition, or who cares for someone with a heart problem. To join, either register at our website **bhf.org.uk/heartmatters** or call **0300 330 3300**. This service is available in English only.

bhf.org.uk

BHF Heart Helpline: 0300 330 3311 – for information and support on anything related to heart health. This service is available in English only. Phone lines open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.

To order these *free* resources, call the **BHF Orderline** on **0870 600 6566**