

Heart Matters

Summer 2026

Heart valve surgery reimaged

Professor Akowuah says robotic and keyhole procedures will help people get back to their lives sooner



Your healthy shopping list

Tips on what foods to buy on a budget

Heart failure in hot weather

How to manage fluid restriction in summer



British Heart Foundation

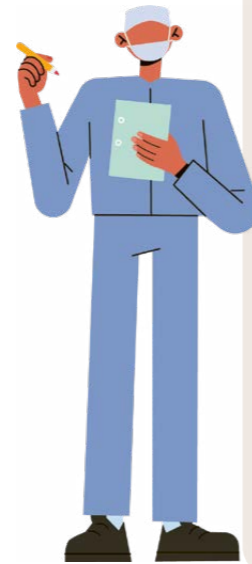
Welcome

Get information, inspiration and support

A magazine you can trust

We put together each issue of Heart Matters with the help of people with heart conditions and healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses and allied health specialists. Every article is triple-checked by our cardiac nurses and dietitians, as well as our research and statistics teams.

We also take pride in being editorially independent, meaning our information will never be influenced by British Heart Foundation (BHF)'s partners, or any other third parties. So you can feel confident that what you're reading is medically accurate, unbiased and up to date.



Got a question or concern?

Contact our cardiac nurses for free on the BHF Heart Helpline:

- ▶ Call **0808 802 1234** weekdays 9am to 5pm (apart from bank holidays).
- ▶ Email **hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk**
- ▶ Live chat on our website: **bhf.org.uk/helpline**

Connect with other people affected by heart conditions and circulatory diseases on our online community:

- ▶ HealthUnlocked: **bhf.org.uk/healthunlocked**



Editor's letter...

Welcome to Heart Matters' summer issue, where stories of resilience and innovation take centre stage. It's an honour to share Linda Watling's inspiring story. After months of unexplained symptoms, doctors discovered a dangerous infection in her mitral valve. Linda reflects on her recovery from open heart surgery and adjusting to life with a replacement valve (**page 10**).

You'll also hear from our cover star Professor Enoch Akowuah, whose BHF-funded research into keyhole techniques will help make heart valve surgery less invasive, making recovery easier for people like Linda (**page 40**). There are also plenty of ideas for a heart-healthy summer, including how to eat more fruit and veg (**page 25**), expert-led warm up exercises (**page 38**) and tapas recipes (**page 22**). Wishing you a happy, fun-filled summer!

Rachelle Beaven, Editor



Support us

Your generosity helps BHF fund lifesaving research and helps us create this magazine.

- ▶ To donate, visit **bhf.org.uk/HMdonate** or send a cheque payable to British Heart Foundation to **BHF, 2300 The Crescent, Birmingham, B37 7YE**.

Want to lower your cholesterol?

We've launched a 6-week, step-by-step email guide to help you steadily build up cholesterol-lowering habits. Each week you'll get expert tips on different topics, such as motivation diet, exercise and medical support, plus inspiration from people like Nigel who've successfully lowered their cholesterol.



Go to **bhf.org.uk/lowercholesterol** or scan the QR code on the left to sign up for free.



Meet our experts

We hear from some of this issue's trusted contributors

Professor Paul Kalra, consultant cardiologist

The close connection between the heart and kidneys is demystified by Professor Kalra of Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust. On **page 18**, he says: **"If a problem occurs in one it can have a knock-on effect on the other."**



Professor Georgina Charlesworth, clinical psychologist

On **page 36**, Professor Charlesworth of University College London explains how loneliness can strike at times of change, such as after a heart attack, even when you're surrounded by people. She shares tips to feel less alone, but says: **"Focus on making one connection at a time and see where it leads."**



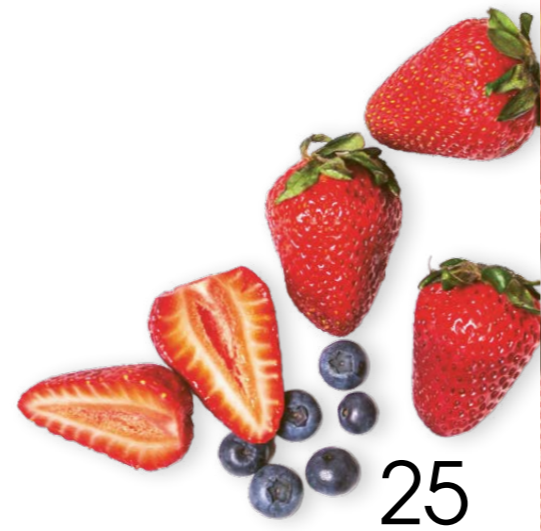
Professor Enoch Akowuah, cardiac surgeon

Routine use of robotic equipment **"would be a gamechanger"** for heart valve procedures, says Professor Akowuah. On **page 40**, the BHF-funded researcher from South Tees University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust says robotic and keyhole procedures will offer people an alternative to open heart surgery.



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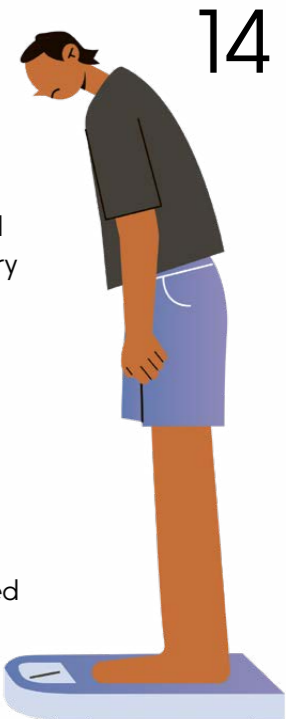
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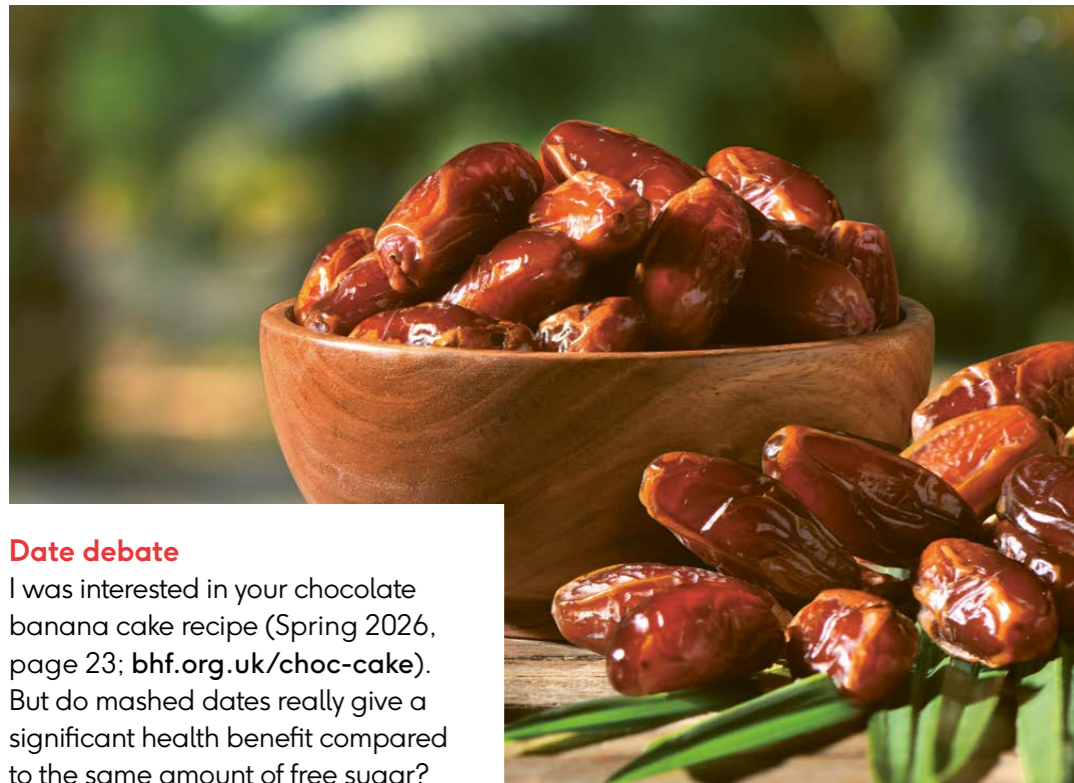
- 1 Coconut oil** has about one-third more saturated fat than butter. So swap to healthier olive or rapeseed oil. See **page 31**.
- 2 Too much alcohol** can raise your risk of abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias). See **page 20**.
- 3 Research into keyhole heart surgery** could mean people are back at work a week after a heart valve replacement. See **page 40**.





Your say

We love to read your emails, letters and tips, so please write to us



Date debate

I was interested in your chocolate banana cake recipe (Spring 2026, page 23; bhf.org.uk/choc-cake). But do mashed dates really give a significant health benefit compared to the same amount of free sugar?

Paul Hubert, West Yorkshire

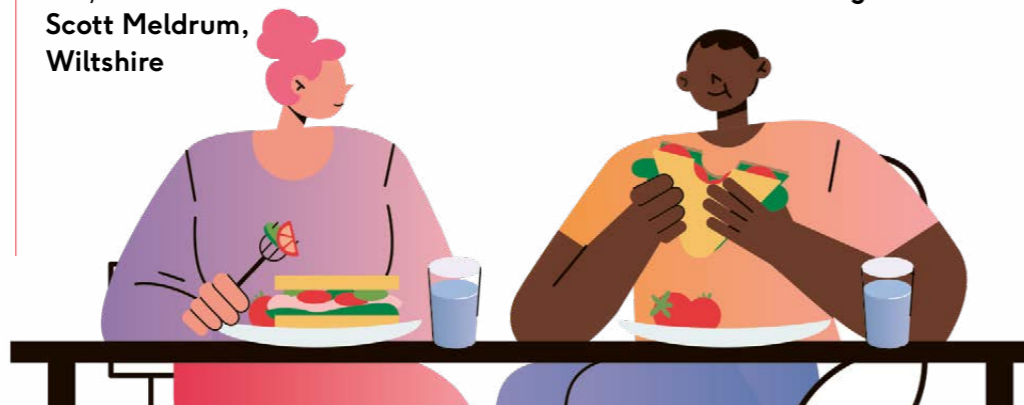
Tracy Parker, BHF Senior Dietitian, says:

Using mashed dates is not the same as using sugar. Dates provide fibre, vitamins and minerals – meaning they can be a more nutritious way to sweeten a recipe than adding the same amount of free sugar. But as a concentrated source of natural sugar and calories, dates are best used in moderation. The recommended portion size for dried fruit is smaller than for fresh fruit – 30g instead of 80g.

Hold the mayo, try salad dressing

I planned on trying all the different salad dressings (bhf.org.uk/salad-dressings). But the first one, Caesar dressing, was so good I got stuck on it. It was delicious on salad. The next day I mixed it with tuna and had it in a sandwich. I've also topped a baked potato with it. I would usually use mayonnaise, but this was so much tastier.

Scott Meldrum, Wiltshire



Need a quick holiday?

Thank you for the article about '6 surprising health benefits of walking' (bhf.org.uk/walking-benefits).

There are some great walks in the Vale of Glamorgan and other beautiful Welsh places. I work full time, mainly office based, and walking really helps me stay positive and energised. I have recently realised that it's all I need on my days off. Once I have walked for about two hours, I feel like I've been on holiday. It's all I want to do and how I like to spend time with my family.

Magdalena Maklakiewicz-Evans, Vale of Glamorgan



Have a ball of a time with Pétanque

One good form of social exercise is the boules game Pétanque. I play in a team at West Hereford Pétanque Club – yes, Hereford in the UK. It's not just played on the continent! Check out your local area for other clubs you can join. We play all year round, too.

Catherine Williamson, Herefordshire

Personalise your pasta

I made the linguine with leeks and mushrooms recipe (bhf.org.uk/linguine) to the letter,

but I decided to add garlic, spring onion and chicken for protein. I also added a small sprinkling of parmesan cheese on top of the pasta – it was delicious!

Helen Guy, Worcestershire

Beware: salty beans

When adding tinned beans to soup, which I often do, why is it recommended to rinse and drain the beans? I usually add the liquid but worry I shouldn't.

Pat Flowerday, Craigavon

Have an opinion?

We want to improve your Heart Matters' experience. Take our short survey to tell us what you think about this issue, and what you'd like to read.

Go to bhf.org.uk/heartsurvey to take the survey. It will take about 5 minutes and we'll use your answers to shape future articles in the magazine.

Have your say by 1 September 2026.

Tracy Parker, BHF Senior Dietitian, says:

The liquid in tinned beans is safe to use – it depends on whether you want to cook the beans in water with or without added salt. For beans in salted water, rinsing them first can significantly reduce the salt content, which is helpful if you are trying to lower your salt intake. This is why BHF recommends choosing beans in unsalted water.

Recipes may also suggest draining the beans to

control the amount of liquid added to the recipe. Adding the tinned fluid can make the dish thinner. The liquid is also starchy from the beans being cooked in it, so adding it may slightly change the texture of the sauce.



Tell us what you think

If you have tried a recipe, benefited from a tip, or learnt something that supports your health and wellbeing, please let us know.

► Email: hmeditor@bhf.org.uk

► Write: **Heart Matters, British Heart Foundation, 180 Hampstead Road, London NW1 7AW.**

Get involved

Discover how BHF saves and improves lives, and help support our work through fundraising, campaigning, volunteering and fun events



'I've helped and I feel appreciated'

After learning that British Heart Foundation (BHF) funded the medicine that saved her life, Brenda Winscott, 74, wanted to give back.

In 1999, Brenda was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy and told she may only live for another five years without a heart transplant.

However, she had the chance to take part in a trial for a combination of medicines, including the beta blocker carvedilol, and 25 years later, she's still alive and well.

Brenda did not know that BHF had funded research into carvedilol

until reading about it years later in a BHF shop. As a way of saying thank you, Brenda began volunteering for her local BHF shop when it opened in Teddington, London, in 2023.

"For me, it's about being grateful and paying something back," she says. Volunteering works for Brenda as it's shorter hours than paid work. "Volunteering is less regimented than paid work, and after each shift, I think, 'I've helped today and I feel appreciated for it'."

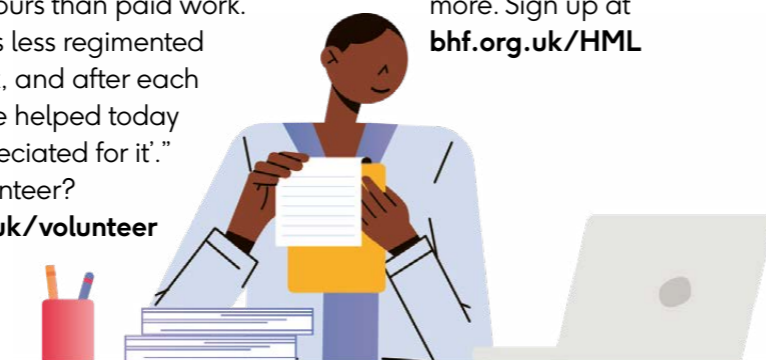
Want to volunteer?
Go to bhf.org.uk/volunteer

Could AI stop heart disease?

Will artificial intelligence (AI) help detect heart conditions earlier and even stop people from developing them in the first place? Find out from BHF experts in our live online question and answer session about AI and heart health.

Join this Heart Matters Live event to put your questions to the BHF-funded researchers who are investigating AI and its potential uses in healthcare. You'll also hear from someone who has successfully made changes to lower their risk of cardiovascular disease.

Tune in for free from 1pm to 2pm on Tuesday 4 August 2026 to learn more. Sign up at bhf.org.uk/HML



Find your secondhand style

Love fashion but want a new outfit without harming the planet or breaking the bank? We've teamed up with Instagram influencer and sustainable style creator Lauren Cooley (@laurenrestyle), who shares tips on how to find hidden gems and style clothes from BHF shops.

As a long-time advocate of shopping secondhand and founder of The Club Preloved – a leading community for sustainable clothing brands – Lauren is the latest BHF Retail Ambassador to inspire more people to shop and donate preloved fashion.

"Shopping preloved is not only a sustainable way to refresh your wardrobe, but it helps make a real impact by helping BHF fund lifesaving research. I'm thrilled to be a BHF Retail Ambassador and show how affordable and stylish secondhand fashion can be," she says.

Find your local BHF shop at bhf.org.uk/shop

BHF launches new online heart failure community

If you're looking to connect with people who have, or care for someone, with heart failure, why not join our new online community on HealthUnlocked?

Here you'll find a safe space to ask questions, receive support and learn more about heart failure from people who are living with the condition.

Join now at bhf.org.uk/healthunlocked

Take part in an event

All year round

Ultra Challenge Series

Sign up to the UK's biggest trek series. Walk, jog or run along stunning coasts or beautiful countryside trails. bhf.org.uk/hmultichallenge

13 September 2026

AJ Bell Great North Run

Take on this half marathon alongside 60,000 runners. Starting in Newcastle, you'll follow the iconic 13.1 mile route to South Shields. bhf.org.uk/hmnorthrun

19 September 2026

London to Brighton Off Road

Join 2,000 riders on this 61-mile course, with superb views and technical terrain, for Europe's biggest charity mountain bike event. bhf.org.uk/hmoffroad

October 2026

Strong Woman Challenge

Want to improve your fitness and build strength while fundraising for BHF? Sign up for this 31-day challenge. bhf.org.uk/strongwoman



Find out more

► Call 0300 222 5721 (weekdays 9am to 5pm) for event information.

After months of unexplained symptoms, Linda Watling, 67, from Norfolk was diagnosed with endocarditis, a potentially fatal infection of the heart

“I had no idea I was living with a dangerous heart condition”



“At the beginning of 2022, I was looking forward to retiring from my busy job in social services and spending more time sewing, gardening and singing in a choir.

But by the time I retired, I was so tired, I'd lost interest in everything. I put it down to a busy life—I had no idea I was living with a dangerous heart condition.

It started with a bad bladder infection. After that, something just felt 'off'. I'd get up in the morning and by the time I'd washed and dried my hair, I was so tired I had to lie down.

I thought my new puppy, Ethel, was making me exhausted. But I started having bad night sweats and had to keep changing the sheets. It was worse than going through the menopause.

I lost my appetite and felt weak all the time. My daughter Emily and son David were quite concerned. I remember writing in my diary, 'I hate this. Why am I feeling unwell all the time?'

Tests found nothing

I kept going to the GP for months, having blood tests, scans and biopsies, but nothing explained these symptoms.

My family has a history of heart problems. My dad died aged 54 from an aortic aneurysm (a bulge in the wall of the largest heart artery).

“I kept going to the GP for months... but nothing explained my symptoms”

Two uncles died of heart attacks, and my cousin had noninfective endocarditis (inflammation of the heart's inner lining that's not due to an infection).

I'd been told I had a heart murmur, an extra sound in my heartbeat, 10 years earlier, and again in March 2022. Both times doctors said it was nothing to worry about. I did wonder if my heart was causing my symptoms. But my biggest fear was that they were signs of cancer.

On 1 September 2022, I woke up feeling a squeezing sensation in my chest and arms. Moments later, I lost my balance and blacked out. When I came round, I called Emily, who took one look at me and rang the NHS 111 helpline.

Doctors diagnosed endocarditis

When I arrived at James Paget University Hospital in Great Yarmouth, I had lots of tests to find out the cause of my chest pain.

A consultant noticed signs of infective endocarditis, an infection in the heart's inner lining, such



Linda thought her new puppy Ethel was the reason she felt exhausted



“Every day is a gift, and I want to make the most out of life”

An MRI found I'd already had three small strokes caused by vegetation breaking off and forming blood clots which travelled to my brain. After seven days in hospital, my condition was so severe that I was blue-lighted to Royal Papworth Hospital, a specialist heart hospital in Cambridge.

When I arrived, I was told my mitral valve was damaged beyond repair and needed to be replaced.

as curled fingernails, caused by a lack of oxygen, and a tiny Janeway lesion – a red dot on my hand.

The infection is caused by bacteria that lives on the skin getting into your bloodstream, which is usually harmless. But, in rare cases like mine, it can attach and grow in the inner lining and valves of the heart, leading to serious problems.

With that diagnosis, I was moved to the cardiac ward. After months of not knowing what was wrong, it felt like I was finally in the right place. A transoesophageal echocardiogram, where they put a small probe down your throat, showed a growth of bacteria (vegetation) inside my heart valve.

When I heard this, I was so relieved I didn't have cancer that I cried. I didn't realise endocarditis is potentially very dangerous.

With little time to think, I had to choose between a biological or mechanical valve.

I chose a mechanical valve, because I was advised it would last longer, even though it meant I would have to take warfarin, a blood-thinning medicine, for life to prevent blood clots.

I went into open heart surgery the next morning. I was so unwell I couldn't even process what was happening. I just wanted to survive.

Waking up after surgery felt surreal. I was exhausted, but already felt better than I had in many months. Within days I was able to get out of bed.



Sewing with a group is helping Linda revive her cognitive skills after a stroke

Friends and family were amazed at how quickly I improved.

Hearing my heart valve 'tick'

I needed six weeks of antibiotics via a drip in both Papworth and James Paget hospitals.

When I got home, I stayed with Emily, her husband James and my grandchildren, Isabel, Benjamin and Sammy, for a month. At first, I couldn't lift a plate without feeling a pulling in my chest. But I was determined to get my fitness back. Two and a half months after surgery, I walked half a mile with Isabel. By January 2023, life was almost back to normal. I went back to my choir and started walking Ethel again.

It took time to get used to my new heart valve. I hear it ticking sometimes, which is normal. When my grandson Sammy first heard

it, I told him, 'I've got something special in my heart'. It's a bit scary to think this little metal device is keeping me alive.

Now I've got a replacement valve, I'm more at risk of getting endocarditis again. It made me feel quite paranoid. When I started gardening again, I wore rubber gloves to stop myself getting scratched. I'm more relaxed now, but I still wear gardening gloves.

In November 2024, I had another stroke. I became confused while visiting my daughter and was rushed to hospital, where I had a seizure and needed intensive care.

The stroke left me with epilepsy, and I now have to take daily anti-seizure medicine. It was a frightening setback. I hated being back in hospital. But with the support of my family, I slowly regained my independence.

Linda's back in the garden, but wears gloves to protect herself from scratches



Sewing sharpens my mind

To help recover from my stroke, I wanted to stimulate my brain, so I started going to a sewing group.

At first, I couldn't even remember how to thread a sewing machine. But with the help of the group, I've made a new blouse. I also started drawing again and joined a musical theatre group.

I used to get anxious about singing in shows. My legs would feel like jelly. But now I've got more confidence – I just get up and do it.

I feel very fortunate to still be here. Every day is a gift, and I want to make the most out of life.” ●

Get more info and support

- ▶ Learn more about endocarditis at [bhf.org.uk/endocarditis](https://www.bhf.org.uk/endocarditis)
- ▶ For more on heart valve surgery, go to [bhf.org.uk/replacement](https://www.bhf.org.uk/replacement)

Ask our nurses

Cardiac care specialists answer your questions on living with a heart condition or a risk factor



Q: How do I manage fluid restriction in hot weather?



Regina Giblin
Senior Cardiac
Nurse, British
Heart Foundation

A: If you live with heart failure and have symptoms, your healthcare team may advise you to limit how much fluid you drink each day. This is called fluid restriction.

It prevents extra fluid building up in your body, which, if left unmanaged, can mean your heart muscle has to work harder to pump blood around your body.

This can lead to symptoms such as swollen ankles and feet, breathlessness, weight gain, and tiredness or fatigue.

Your doctor or nurse will tell you how much you can drink each day. But, as a guide,

the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends restricting fluids to six to eight cups (1.5 to 2 litres) a day.

Your healthcare team will also let you know how long to limit your fluid intake for. In most cases, it will be just a few weeks and you'll be closely monitored.

Feeling thirsty is often the hardest part of fluid restriction. When it's hot, you feel thirstier because your body loses more fluids through sweating. Your healthcare team will explain what to do in warm weather, but NICE states that in high heat, you should increase fluid intake to prevent dehydration even if you're on fluid restriction. Get tips for managing thirst at [bhf.org.uk/fluid-restriction](https://www.bhf.org.uk/fluid-restriction)

Q: What's the difference between atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter?

A: Atrial fibrillation (AF) and atrial flutter are both abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias). They occur when there's an issue with the electrical signals and pathways in your heart. These signals help the heart beat in an organised way. When they're not working properly, the heart may beat in a disorganised way.



Ruth Goss
Senior Cardiac
Nurse, British
Heart Foundation

The heart has four chambers: two at the top, called the atria, and two at the bottom, called the ventricles. When the heart is working properly, the atria contract and push blood into the ventricles, which is what we refer to as a 'beat'.

Typically, the heart beats 60 to 100 times a minute when you are at rest – this is called your resting heart rate.

Both atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter can make your heart beat too quickly. But they differ in that in atrial fibrillation, the atria beat too quickly in an irregular way, and in atrial flutter, the atria beat too quickly in a regular way. Both conditions can make your resting heart rate faster than 100 beats per minute, which doctors can detect using an ECG (electrocardiogram) machine.



Q: Why do I bruise more easily on blood-thinning medicines like apixaban and aspirin?

A: Blood-thinning medicines act on the body's clotting processes, which are an important part of the healing process. But clotting can be dangerous when clots form inside blood vessels already narrowed by cardiovascular disease (CVD). If this happens, the clot can block blood flow to the heart or brain, leading to a heart attack or stroke.

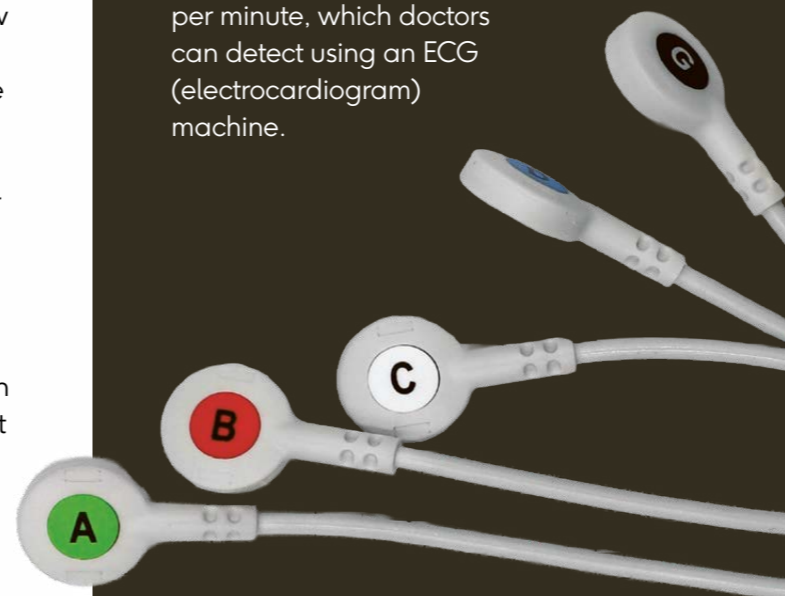
To help stop this, doctors prescribe blood-thinning medicines to some people with CVD. These include anticoagulants like warfarin and apixaban, and antiplatelets such as aspirin and clopidogrel.

If you are on blood-thinners, you may bruise more easily or have worse bruises than usual because the drugs slow down blood clotting.

When you injure the smallest blood vessels under the skin, blood leaks into the tissues and makes a bruise. With blood-thinning medicines, the blood takes longer than normal to stop leaking, leaving you with a quicker and/or more severe bruise. For most people, bruising is very manageable. But if it's persistent and comes with other symptoms, speak with your doctor, as they may need to adjust the dose of your blood-thinner, or offer you a different medicine. ●

Get your questions answered

- ▶ Go to [bhf.org.uk/ask-expert](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ask-expert) to find more information from experts including: **Can heart failure cause sudden weight gain? Is massage safe with a heart condition?**
- ▶ Send your questions to hmeditor@bhf.org.uk
- ▶ Find more ways to contact us on [page 2](#)



The heart-kidney connection



Professor Paul Kalra
Professor of Cardiology, Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust

Heart failure puts you at greater risk of kidney disease and vice versa. Here's why cardiorenal syndrome happens and the signs to know

The organs that keep your body functioning do not work in isolation – they are connected by the circulatory system that supplies them with the blood they need to work. Because of this, if a problem occurs in one, it can harm another.

When this happens between the heart and kidneys, it can lead to cardiorenal syndrome, a condition that can happen quickly (acute) or over time (chronic), and is usually life-limiting without treatment.

You are at higher risk of cardiorenal syndrome if you have heart failure or chronic kidney disease (CKD). Both share several risk factors: high blood pressure (hypertension), atherosclerosis (a build-up

of fatty material in the artery walls supplying the organs), obesity and diabetes.

How they work together

The heart and kidneys operate in partnership to keep your body working correctly, with 20 to 25 per cent of the blood pumped out by each beat of your heart going to your kidneys.

Your heart's job is to:

- ▶ Pump a constant supply of blood rich in oxygen and nutrients around your body, to help your organs and muscles work.
- ▶ Pump blood containing unwanted carbon dioxide into your lungs to be breathed out.

Your kidneys' job is to:

- ▶ Filter your blood of waste products and send them to the bladder to pass out as pee.
- ▶ Regulate your body's water, mineral and salt levels, to control blood volume and blood pressure.
- ▶ Release hormones including: renin, which raises your blood pressure by instructing your small blood vessels to narrow; erythropoietin, which stimulates the production of red blood cells to carry oxygen around your body.

How heart failure damages the kidneys

Heart failure can cause fluid to build up in blood vessels, including those going to and from your kidneys. This extra fluid means your kidneys have to work harder to regulate it.

They can also become damaged because they're not getting enough oxygen-rich blood

from the heart to keep working properly. As a result, the kidneys may secrete more renin to increase your blood pressure, which puts more strain on your heart.

It's a vicious cycle as the two work against each other. If this goes untreated, it can cause kidney disease or even kidney failure.

How kidney disease damages the heart

Kidney Research UK says people with chronic kidney disease are 20 times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease (CVD) than kidney failure, such is the impact it has on the heart and blood vessels.

This is because when your kidneys are unable to do their many jobs properly, it

“You are at higher risk of cardiorenal syndrome if you have heart failure or chronic kidney disease”

causes fluid to build up and blood pressure to increase, both of which strain your heart and circulatory system.

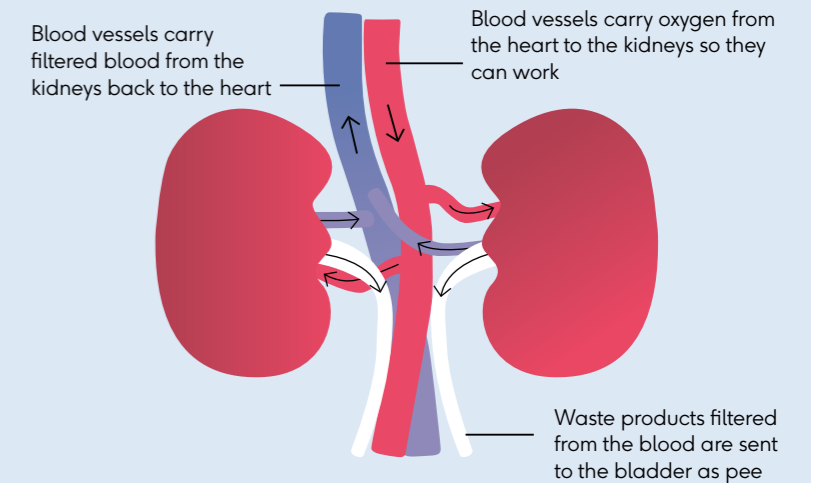
You may also suffer from a lack of red blood cells and develop anaemia, which means the blood cannot carry enough oxygen, as well as retain fluid in your tissues that leads to swelling.

Another complication can be excess potassium in your blood (hyperkalaemia), because your kidneys cannot regulate it. Some medicines used to treat chronic kidney disease can raise potassium levels too. Having too much potassium can cause abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias).

Cardiorenal syndrome: the signs to know

If you have heart failure you may not spot the signs of kidney disease. This is because they

How the circulatory system links the heart and kidneys



have overlapping symptoms, including:

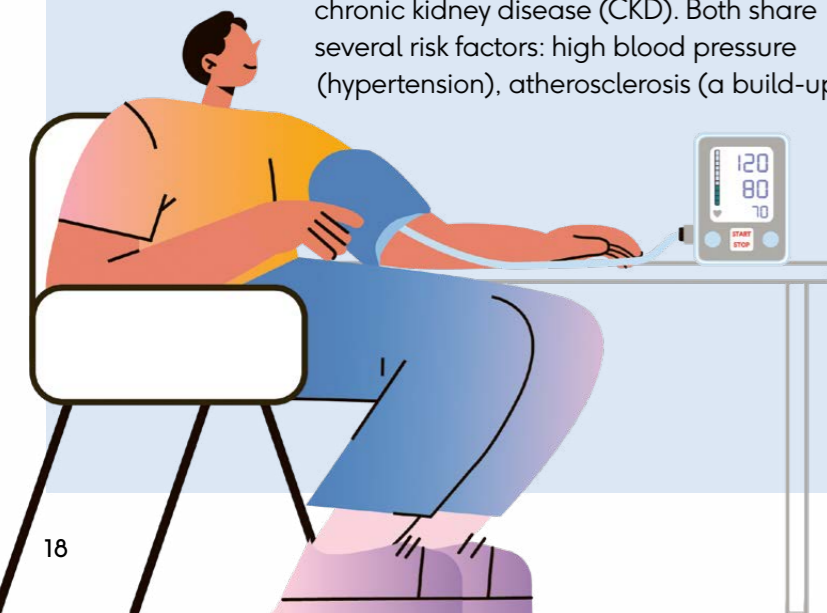
- ▶ tiredness
- ▶ swollen ankles and feet or hands
- ▶ shortness of breath
- ▶ peeing less
- ▶ low blood pressure (hypotension).

Due to this close link, your doctor should routinely check your kidneys if you have heart failure. If this is not happening, you can request tests to detect cardiorenal syndrome.

Treatment for cardiorenal syndrome

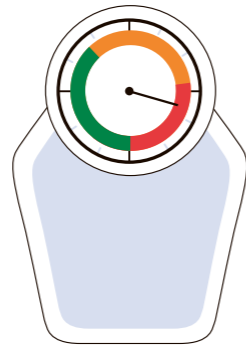
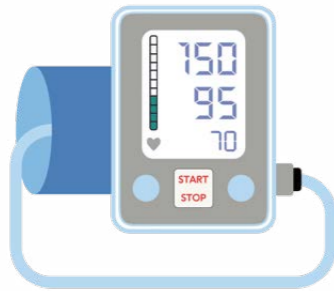
The main aim of treatment is to continue your heart failure medicines, although you may need lower doses. The focus is on reducing fluid overload while keeping an adequate blood supply to the heart and kidneys

Medicines most commonly used include water tablets (diuretics), ACE inhibitors, ARBs (angiotensin receptor blockers) and beta blockers. They counteract the over-activation of the hormone system and can slow the decline in kidney function. You may be prescribed SGLT2 inhibitors too, which can ease heart failure symptoms and slow the progress of kidney disease. There's a huge amount doctors can do to treat cardiorenal syndrome and extend life expectancy. ●



4 ways alcohol affects your heart

Looking for motivation to cut down on drinking? Here's how it raises your risk of cardiovascular disease



Weakens the heart

Drinking too much alcohol over a long time (years) can weaken and enlarge the heart muscle, which is a condition called cardiomyopathy. This makes the heart less efficient at pumping, potentially leading to heart failure. The NHS recommends limiting alcohol to a maximum of 14 units per week – around six pints of beer or six medium glasses of wine – spread evenly over three days or more.

Bad for blood pressure

Your blood pressure temporarily rises every time you drink alcohol. There's also a clear link between regularly drinking too much alcohol and long-term high blood pressure (hypertension), which is a major risk factor for having a heart attack or stroke. If you already have high blood pressure, cutting down on alcohol or stopping altogether can help to reduce or control it.

Worse for weight

Alcohol can increase your appetite and lead to unhealthy food choices, which can make it harder to manage your weight. Many alcoholic drinks are also high in calories, with around 60kcal in every unit. Mixers often contain a lot of added sugar, which increases their calorie content even more. Try swapping to a non-alcoholic or low-alcohol drink, as they may have fewer calories.

Triggers heart rhythm issues

Too much alcohol can raise your risk of abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias) like atrial fibrillation (AF). Some people also find drinking alcohol increases their heart rate or causes heart palpitations. Speak to your doctor if you often experience this. They may advise you to cut back on drinking if you find alcohol triggers your symptoms. ●

Eatwell



PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVEN JOYCE

Inside:

- ▶ Tapas for al fresco dining
- ▶ How to eat more fruit and veg
- ▶ Tips for a healthy food shop
- ▶ Are avocados good for you?

Energy KJ: 440 Kcal: 105	5%
Carbs 1.9g	
Fibre 1g	3%
Fat 3.6g	5% Low
Saturates 0.6g	3% Low
Sugar 1.4g	2% Low
Salt 0.48g	8% Low



How to read the nutrition labels

- ▶ **g** = the grams of each nutrient in one portion
- ▶ **%** = proportion of an adult's recommended daily intake per portion
- ▶ **traffic light colours:** show if a food is low (green), medium (amber) or high (red) in fat, saturated fat, sugars or salt in 100g of the recipe.

Garlic and lemon prawns with courgettes

Fresh and light with plenty of flavour and a little hint of spice.

Preparation time: 5 minutes
Cooking time: 8 minutes
Serves 4 | Suitable for freezing

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp extra virgin oil
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 medium courgettes, thickly sliced
- 250g (8oz) raw king prawns, shelled
- Pinch dried chilli flakes
- Juice 1 lemon
- 2 tbsp parsley, finely chopped

- 1 Heat the oil in a frying pan and add the garlic. Cook for 1 minute.
- 2 Add the courgettes and fry for 3 minutes or until lightly browned.
- 3 Add the prawns and fry, stirring until they turn pink.
- 4 Add the chilli flakes, lemon juice and parsley, and serve as part of the tapas menu.

How we made it healthier

Including healthy veg like courgettes adds extra goodness to this classic dish.

Roasted red peppers

Savoury and satisfying with anchovies and mozzarella.

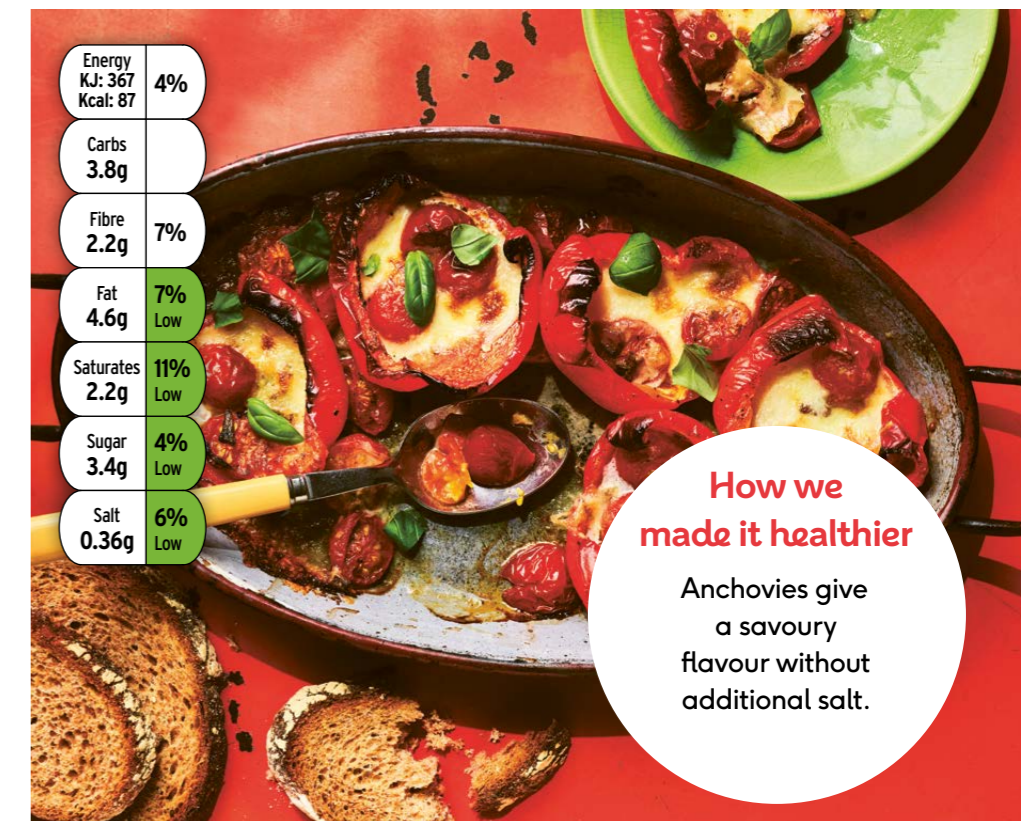
Preparation time: 10 minutes
Cooking time: 35 minutes
Serves 6 | Suitable for freezing

Ingredients

- 3 red peppers
- 200g (7oz) cherry tomatoes
- 3 anchovies, from a can, drained and finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 6 basil leaves, torn
- 200g (7oz) ball reduced-fat mozzarella, sliced

- 1 Cut the peppers in half lengthways and remove core, pith and seeds. Place the peppers in a shallow roasting tin and set the oven at 180°C/160°C fan or gas mark 4.
- 2 Cut the cherry tomatoes in half and divide between the peppers. Sprinkle with anchovies and garlic. Drizzle with oil and season with black pepper.
- 3 Roast for about 25 minutes until the peppers are tender.
- 4 Add the basil and mozzarella to the peppers. Return to the oven for another 10 minutes until the cheese is golden and melting.
- 5 Serve with warm wholemeal bread, if desired. ▶

Energy KJ: 367 Kcal: 87	4%
Carbs 3.8g	
Fibre 2.2g	7%
Fat 4.6g	7% Low
Saturates 2.2g	11% Low
Sugar 3.4g	4% Low
Salt 0.36g	6% Low



How we made it healthier

Anchovies give a savoury flavour without additional salt.

Patatas bravas

Crispy fluffy potatoes with a hint of smoky spice.

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 45 minutes

Serves 4 | Suitable for freezing

Ingredients

- 500g (1lb) potatoes, peeled
- 4 tsp olive oil
- 2 tsp sweet smoked paprika
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 small onion or 2 shallots, finely diced
- 400g (14oz) can chopped tomatoes

- 1 Set oven to 220°C/200°C fan or gas mark 6.
- 2 Cut the potatoes into 3cm chunks and place in a large roasting

dish. Drizzle with 2 tsp of the oil and sprinkle with 1 tsp paprika.

- 3 Add 1 clove of the crushed garlic, toss with the potatoes and roast for 45 minutes until golden.
- 4 Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 tsp oil in a small frying pan and fry the onion or shallots on a medium heat for 10 minutes until really soft and tender.
- 5 Add the remaining crushed garlic and fry for 1 minute, then add the chopped tomatoes and the remaining 1 tsp of paprika. Simmer on a medium heat for 15 minutes until the mixture has reduced to a thick sauce.
- 6 Stir the sauce through the potatoes and serve hot. ●

Tell us what you think

We'd love to hear your thoughts on our recipes, and any tweaks you made to them.

- ▶ Email us with photos of your dishes to hmeditor@bhf.org.uk
- ▶ Go to **page 7** for more ways to contact us.

Want more heart healthy recipes?

Find 100s of dietitian approved recipes at bhf.org.uk/recipefinder

5 ways to eat more fruit and veg

Getting your 5-a-day is easier than you think with these simple tips



2 Love your fruit bowl

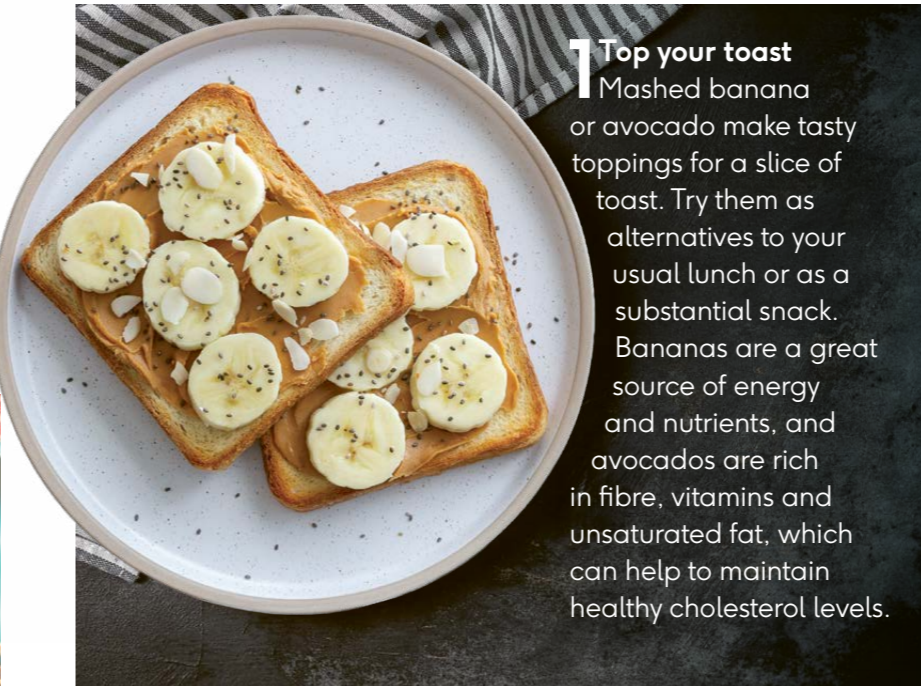
Having a well-stocked fruit bowl adds colour to your home and may encourage you to snack on it rather than biscuits or cake. While it tastes sweet, fresh fruit is lower in calories than sugary treats and contains fibre, which helps you feel fuller for longer.

3 Jazz up your sides

Why not try adding peas or sweetcorn to your rice? Put frozen veg into the saucepan halfway through the rice's cooking time or simply stir them through the rice for a couple of minutes after it's cooked. You can also do this with couscous. Tinned vegetables – in water without added salt or sugar – are also a healthy addition.

5 Go for fruity breakfasts

It's easy to get two portions of different fruits with your morning porridge, muesli or yogurt. Fruit adds natural sweetness and is a great source of vitamin C and fibre. Add a combination of raisins, dried apricots, sliced banana or a handful of blueberries, strawberries or raspberries. ●



1 Top your toast

Mashed banana or avocado make tasty toppings for a slice of toast. Try them as alternatives to your usual lunch or as a substantial snack. Bananas are a great source of energy and nutrients, and avocados are rich in fibre, vitamins and unsaturated fat, which can help to maintain healthy cholesterol levels.

4 Make a cracking omelette

An omelette is a great way to boost your vegetable count. Onion, tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, sweetcorn, peas and spinach all work very well when added to the egg mixture. Or make a twist on a Spanish omelette by using sweet potatoes instead of white ones.



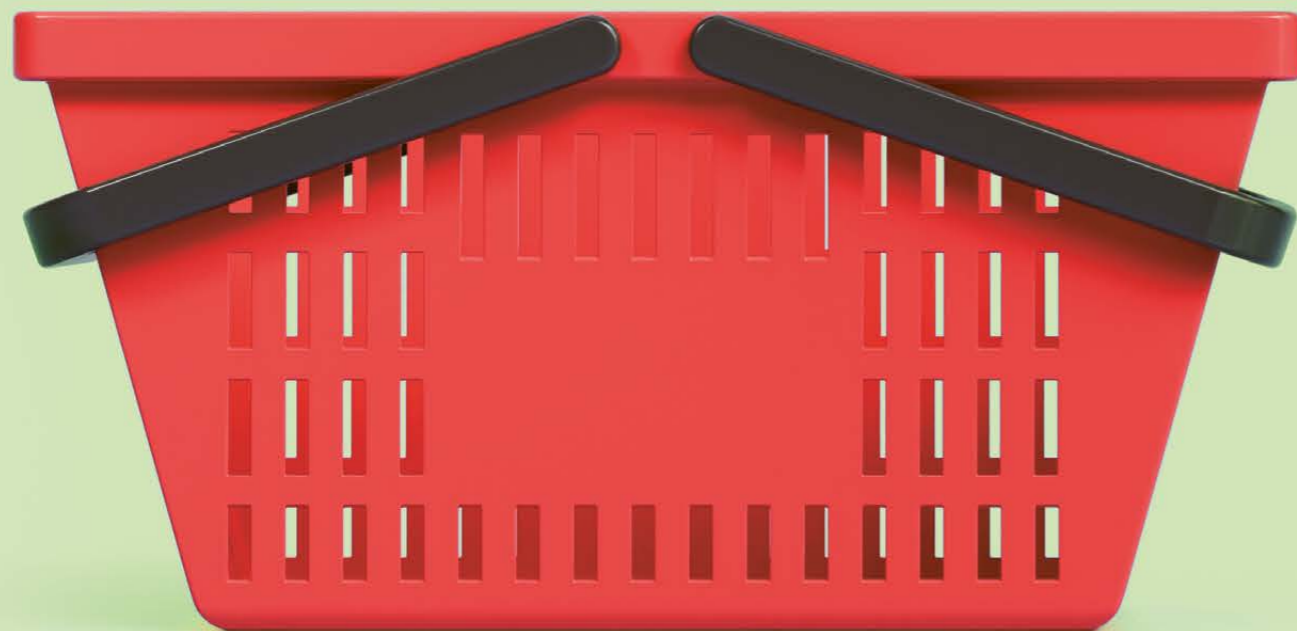
Energy KJ: 660 Kcal: 156	8%
Carbs 30g	
Fibre 4.3g	14%
Fat 3.4g	5% Low
Saturates 0.5g	3% Low
Sugar 6g	7% Low
Salt 0.01g	0% Low



Dell Stanford
Senior Dietitian,
British Heart
Foundation

Your healthy shopping list made easy

Our senior dietitian shares how to make your weekly food shop affordable and good for your heart



Proteins

- ▶ Lean unprocessed meat such as chicken, turkey, extra lean beef mince
- ▶ Fish, fresh, frozen, or canned in water (not brine) or tomato sauce
- ▶ Chickpeas, beans and lentils, canned in water
- ▶ Plant-based proteins such as plain tofu, plain soya mince
- ▶ Eggs
- ▶ Nuts, plain or unsalted, and nut butters

Fruit and veg

- ▶ Fresh
- ▶ Frozen
- ▶ Canned with no added salt or sugar

Consider canned or frozen

They're often cheaper than fresh fruit and veg and can be just as healthy if free from added salt or sugar. Check labels and avoid brine or syrups. Buying frozen can also help you reduce waste. Cook what you need and put the rest back in the freezer.

Carbs

- ▶ Wholemeal bread, chapattis, naan, flatbreads
- ▶ Wholewheat pasta, noodles and cereals
- ▶ Wholegrain rice, couscous, barley, quinoa
- ▶ Potatoes, plantain, yams
- ▶ Oats

Choose wholegrain, wholemeal

Most people are not eating the recommended 30g per day of fibre needed for good health. Wholegrain and wholemeal carbs provide much more fibre, B vitamins and protective plant chemicals than 'white' carbs. Seeded bread adds healthy unsaturated fats as well as more fibre. Check cereal labels to choose ones high in fibre but low in sugar and salt.

Stock up on beans

Bulk out meat-based recipes like cottage pie, chilli or Bolognese with beans (canned in water) to make them healthier and to save money. If you eat mostly plant-based protein, chickpeas, beans, lentils and tofu are often healthier and cheaper than processed vegan foods such as plant-based burgers and sausages.



Oils and spreads

- ▶ Unsaturated oils such as olive oil, rapeseed oil (vegetable oil) and sunflower oil
- ▶ Fat spreads made from olive oil or vegetable oils

Opt for unsaturated fats

Instead of butter, choose fat spreads made from olive or vegetable oils so you're having less unhealthy saturated fat. Oils in plastic bottles labelled 'vegetable oil' are almost always 100 per cent rapeseed oil and are often much cheaper than those labelled 'rapeseed' in fancy glass bottles. Since it's high in healthy unsaturated fats, rapeseed oil can be a good option for cooking.

Dairy and vegan alternatives

- ▶ Reduced-fat milk: semi-skimmed or skimmed
- ▶ Unsweetened non-dairy alternatives to milk fortified with calcium
- ▶ Reduced-fat cheese, including low-fat soft cheese, cottage cheese and half-fat cheddar
- ▶ Lower-fat yogurt, without added sugar

Go for unsweetened

Be aware that many flavoured yogurts and non-dairy alternatives to milk, such as oat, almond and soya, have added sugar. Check labels to pick ones that do not have added sugar, and if you're choosing non-dairy alternatives, look for ones that are fortified with calcium.

Snacks

- ▶ Fresh or dried fruit
- ▶ Vegetable batons
- ▶ Unsalted nuts and seeds
- ▶ Popping corn
- ▶ Oat, rice or corn cakes (plain varieties)

Make your own simple snacks

Fresh fruit is a healthy, sweet alternative to chocolate, cakes and biscuits. Or combine a small portion of dried fruit with a handful of unsalted, uncoated nuts and seeds to make a cheap trail mix. Making your own popcorn also works out cheaper, and you can control the salt and sugar levels.

Seasoning, sauces and condiments

- ▶ Fresh, frozen or dried herbs
- ▶ Spices such as ginger, garlic, chillies
- ▶ Lemon, zest and juice
- ▶ Vinegar
- ▶ Low-salt or salt-free stock
- ▶ Reduced-salt and reduced-sugar sauces and condiments

Cut down on salt with smart buys

Herbs and spices, lemon juice and lemon zest are a great way to flavour foods and cut back on salt in your cooking. Check the labels on stocks, soy sauce and ketchups, and choose low-salt varieties. And a dash of cheap vinegar can be a more cost-effective, less salty alternative to classic Worcestershire sauce.

Drinks

- ▶ Water or flavoured water with no added sugar
- ▶ Coffee and tea, either black, green or herbal
- ▶ Milk, skimmed or semi-skimmed
- ▶ Unsweetened soft drinks

Go for green labels

Check nutrition labelling on drinks and go for green or amber colour-coded labels. Avoid cordials or carbonated drinks with added sugar, and coffee drinks with added syrups, sugar or cream. Limit fruit juice and smoothies to one small glass per day (150ml) at most, and drink with a meal as they are high in 'free' sugar.

How to prepare for a food shop

To make planning easier and shopping more cost-effective:

- ▶ Start slowly by planning two or three days of meals, or try our seven-day meal plan: bhf.org.uk/7daysmeals
- ▶ Go for meals with shared ingredients. For example, cottage pie and meatballs are both made with extra-lean minced beef. And a homemade tomato sauce can be used in pasta dishes, soup and curries.
- ▶ Plan to make enough leftovers for the next day or to freeze for a later date.
- ▶ Check what ingredients you already have at home.
- ▶ Organise your list according to the supermarket or shop's layout, so you do not miss anything.
- ▶ Sense check before bulk buying. Although it can be cheaper, there's no point if you're not going to use it.
- ▶ Online shopping can

provide a wider variety of healthier food options than in smaller, local shops, and can help avoid impulse buys. But be aware of product recommendations that may not be so healthy. ●



Ask our dietitians

Our experts answer your questions on eating and drinking for a healthy heart



Dell Stanford
Senior Dietitian,
British Heart
Foundation



Q: Are avocados good for you?

A: Avocados are an unusual fruit because they contain lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre, but are high in fat. Fortunately, more than 70 per cent is the healthy unsaturated kind, which can help to lower your cholesterol.

Their creamy taste means they can feel indulgent, making them a good substitute for foods like cheese, butter and fatty meats high in unhealthy saturated fats. Avocados also fit well into heart-healthy diets such as the Mediterranean and DASH diets.

Half a medium avocado (80g) counts as one serving towards your 5-a-day and can help boost your potassium intake, which studies have linked with lower blood pressure. Avocados are rich in polyphenols and other protective plant chemicals that have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects linked to lowering your risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) too.

Research in the Journal of the American Heart Association suggests eating two or more servings per week can lower the risk of CVD by 16 per cent. Just be wary of portion size if you're trying to lose weight. Their high fat content means they have more calories than other fruits and vegetables.



Q: Is garlic beneficial for your heart health?

A: Garlic has long been associated with health benefits, from curing a cold to lowering blood pressure and improving total cholesterol. This is often due to its levels of antioxidants, a group of natural compounds linked with a lower risk of CVD.

One of these is allicin. It's produced by chopping or crushing garlic, with some studies suggesting levels are highest about 10 minutes after doing so. Therefore, dried and ready-chopped garlic may contain lower levels than fresh. Studies also suggest that garlic supplements and products such as capsules, powder and garlic extract contain less allicin than fresh garlic. They're often made using black garlic – fresh garlic heated at a high humidity for several weeks – and other forms of 'aged' garlic. But garlic products may have higher levels of more powerful antioxidants and polyphenols than fresh garlic.

When it comes to specific health claims about raw, fresh white garlic, strong evidence is limited. And evidence that garlic supplements lead to small improvements in total cholesterol is mixed. A recent analysis of the effect of garlic products on pre-existing high blood pressure also showed a minimal impact.

It's much better to include fresh garlic as part of a healthy diet. Garlic supplements can interact with certain medications such as blood-thinning medicines, so check with your GP first.

Get your questions answered

- ▶ Find more answers from our experts online at bhf.org.uk/ask-dietitian including: **Is rapeseed oil healthy? What counts as 5-a-day?**
- ▶ Send your questions to hmeditor@bhf.org.uk
- ▶ Go to **page 2** for more ways to contact us.

Q: Is coconut oil bad for cholesterol levels?

A: Diets high in saturated fat can raise bad (LDL) cholesterol in the blood, and high cholesterol raises your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Coconut oil has about one third more saturated fat than butter, but you may have heard claims it does not raise cholesterol in the same way.



Tracy Parker
Senior Dietitian,
British Heart
Foundation

This idea partly comes from research using pure MCT (medium-chain triglyceride) oil, which is made of medium-chain fats. These are absorbed quickly by the body and used for energy rather than stored as fat. Because of how they're processed, they do not raise blood cholesterol.

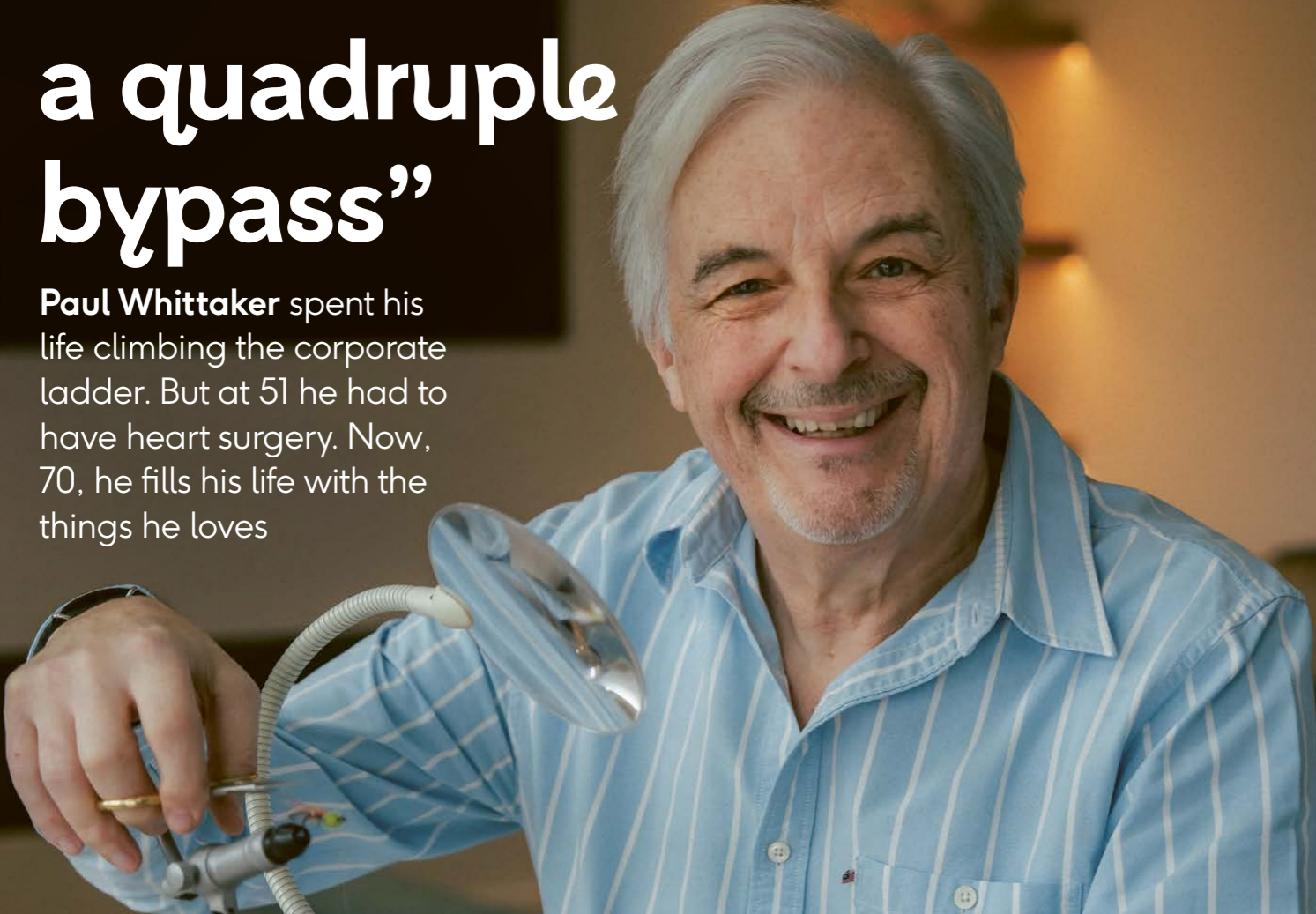
The saturated fat in coconut oil is mostly lauric acid, technically a medium-chain fat. However, the MCT oils in these studies did not include lauric acid as it behaves more like a long-chain saturated fat, requiring digestion rather than providing rapid energy, and does raise LDL cholesterol.

To keep cholesterol levels healthy, continue to replace saturated fats, like coconut oil, with unsaturated fats, such as olive or rapeseed oil. ●



“Work was everything. Then I was told I needed a quadruple bypass”

Paul Whittaker spent his life climbing the corporate ladder. But at 51 he had to have heart surgery. Now, 70, he fills his life with the things he loves



“I never thought I’d be the one sitting in a cardiologist’s office being told I needed quadruple bypass surgery.

Heart disease was something that happened to other people – older men, heavy smokers, those who didn’t look after themselves. Not me.

I was 51, fit, not overweight, only a social smoker. I’d spent my life

working hard, climbing the ladder in banking until I was managing nearly 3,000 staff in 100 branches across Manchester.

Work was everything. I did 16-hour days and thrived on the pressure: on being the one who could handle the tough jobs. I thought that made me strong.

In 2007, my partner Lynne and I went to Tuscany in Italy.

During the holiday, I proposed and she accepted.

But while we were there, I felt a strange discomfort in my collarbone. It wasn’t pain exactly, but it left me short of breath. Lynne insisted I get it checked when we got home.

Within weeks, I was sitting in front of a cardiologist, who diagnosed me with angina caused

by coronary heart disease. Fatty material had built up in the blood vessels of my heart, leading them to become narrowed or blocked, putting me at high risk of heart attack and stroke.

The cardiologist looked me straight in the eye and said we were going to be very good friends because I needed to have a quadruple bypass.

The words hit me like a hammer because I didn’t have any risk factors for angina, like high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

But I had a stressful job, I was a social smoker and my mother had angina at a young age too. I remember thinking, ‘If it’s got me this young, it must be serious’.

Lynne had lost her father to cancer just weeks earlier, and now she was facing the possibility of losing me as well. It felt like the ground had shifted beneath us.

What if I do not wake up?

On 5 November 2007, I had my quadruple bypass surgery. The team would need to take blood vessels from my chest or legs and graft them into my heart, creating four new routes for blood to flow around (bypass) the narrowed or blocked arteries.

Going into theatre, the anaesthetist was joking with me that the drugs were like ‘pints of beer’. I laughed, but inside I was terrified. I trusted the surgeons and medical team, but I couldn’t

shake the thought: ‘What if I don’t wake up?’.

I did wake up, 12 hours later, finding myself in intensive care. I was on a ventilator, surrounded by glowing monitors in the dark. It felt eerie, otherworldly. Relief washed over me: I was alive.

But I later learned that my heart had gone into a dangerous supraventricular tachycardia (SVT) rhythm during surgery and had to be shocked back. That knowledge stayed with me. I realised how close I’d come to not surviving.

“Bypass surgery saved my life, but more than that, it changed it”

Recovery was painful. Nurses taught me to cough again by clutching a pillow, or in my case, a soft toy called Ice Bat. It sounds almost childlike, but that toy became a symbol of survival. Every cough hurt, but every cough also meant that I was healing.

Healing built strong bonds

Daniel, my then eight-year-old stepson, became my walking companion. He understood the seriousness of it all and took responsibility far beyond his

Real life



Paul has a passion for coffee and enjoys fly-fishing (below)



PHOTOGRAPHY: TIM BEKIR



Paul today, with wife Lynne and dog Freddy

years. Those walks with him weren't just exercise – they were moments of bonding, of hope.

We bought Hamish, a West Highland Terrier, to keep me walking. He was my companion for 15 years and now my current pet, Freddy, has taken his place. Dogs became part of my healing, pulling me forward when I might have stayed still.

At times it felt tough. Then slowly but surely, I regained my fitness. By June 2008, I'd completed cardiac rehab and was climbing a Scottish mountain with my family.

Two months later, Lynne and I married in a small ceremony with 17 guests. We'd survived the storm and we wanted to celebrate life together.

No more work stress

Going back to work was harder than I expected. A change in management left me feeling unsupported and I realised I didn't want to spend the rest of my life stressed by corporate politics.

At 53, I took early retirement. It was a huge decision, but the heart bypass surgery had changed my priorities.

I wanted to be stressed about things that mattered: family, health, happiness – not meetings and targets.

Lynne and I moved to the countryside. She found joy in fundraising for good causes.

And I began volunteering, mentoring small businesses and emptying charity collection boxes. We built a new life centred on community and balance.

“We'd survived the storm and we wanted to celebrate life together”

Life is filled with love

My mantra now is 'everything in moderation'. I love dog-walking, fly-fishing, playing piano and travelling. I've become a coffee enthusiast, with a proper espresso machine and European trips to find the best roasters.

I was 70 earlier this year and I am enjoying celebrating that milestone. I'd love to catch a 15lb salmon and finally attend a concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

My ultimate ambition is to outlive my parents, who reached their mid-80s, and maybe even crack 100.

The heart bypass surgery saved my life, but more than that, it changed it. It forced me to stop, to reassess, to put myself and my family first.

Without it, I'd probably have worked until I dropped.

I don't share my story to boast. I share it because I want people to see what's possible.

If you're facing this surgery, don't hesitate. Get on with it. Just do it. It's terrifying, but nearly 20 years later, it's like it never happened.

The life you get back – the walks with your child, the dog at your side and the chance to grow old with the person you love – is worth everything.” ●

Get more info and support

► Go to bhf.org.uk/bypassurgery to learn more.

We have lots of information about looking after your heart



Scan the QR code with the camera on your phone for more information

You can read and order our booklets for free at bhf.org.uk/publications or scan the QR code with the camera on your phone.





Professor Georgina Charlesworth
Professor of Clinical Psychology of Ageing and Dementia,
University College London

How to tackle loneliness

Feeling alone can affect your health. Here are the signs to look out for and tips on connecting with others

All of us feel lonely sometimes. In fact, the World Health Organization estimates that loneliness affects one in six people and up to one in three older people globally.

It's often caused by social isolation—a lack of contact with others—and can happen at times of change, such as losing a loved one. Having a serious health event, like a heart attack or stroke, can also feel very isolating.

You can still feel lonely even when you're with other people. For example, if you've been diagnosed with a health condition, it may be harder to talk to people if you feel they do not understand what you're going through.

“Loneliness affects one in six people and up to one in three older people”

Raises risk of health issues

Feeling lonely can have a real impact on mental wellbeing and is strongly linked to an increased risk of depression.

Loneliness and social isolation may affect physical health too. Studies suggest it raises the risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia and type 2 diabetes.

While the exact causes are unclear, it's thought that people who feel lonely may be more likely to self-medicate with unhealthy habits, such as drinking too much alcohol or smoking.

Are you lonely?

It can be hard to tell if you or a loved one is lonely. While the signs vary, you may feel depressed, less motivated, easily rejected or upset.

Loneliness can also affect your confidence to meet new people and engage with them. You may turn down invitations to socialise because you're worried or scared.

In the moment, when you're on your own and feeling lonely, try to acknowledge how you feel without letting it weigh you down.

Think about what gives you a boost. It may be watching your favourite TV programme, listening to uplifting music or getting some fresh air in your garden. Speaking to someone on the phone is another way to feel more connected when you are alone.

Building relationships takes time

In the long term, shared interests and activities are a great way to meet people. Doing something new can feel scary, so try something small and manageable first, like joining an online forum, or attending an event with someone you already know.

Try not to put pressure on yourself to build an entire new social network immediately. Focus on making one connection at a time and seeing where it leads.

Tips on meeting new people

1 Pick up a hobby
Why not take up a new hobby or pick up an old one? If you're retired or semi-retired, the University of the Third Age runs different local classes and groups. Learn more at u3a.org.uk

2 Try a befriending service
Lots of organisations can connect you with someone to talk to on a regular basis. If you're over 60, you can sign up for Age UK's Telephone Friendship Service at ageuk.org.uk/befriending

3 Become a volunteer
If there's a charity or organisation you support, volunteering can help you get out of the house and meet new people. Find out about volunteering for British Heart Foundation on [page 8](#).

4 Join a support group
If you have a heart condition, or you're caring for someone with one, you can speak to people in the same boat at our online and in-person support groups. Learn more at bhf.org.uk/support

5 Get active
Regular exercise can help you spend time with people and look after your heart at the same time. Health walks are free guided walks at a comfortable pace designed to help people get active. Discover one near you on your local county website, or go to ramblers.org.uk

6 Speak to your GP
If you're feeling isolated, your GP or nurse may be able to refer you to free social groups or community events. This is called 'social prescribing' and can be offered to people of all ages. To find out more, ask your GP about social prescribing services in your area. ●

Get more info and support

► Visit samaritans.org or call their helpline on **116 123** (open 24 hours) for immediate support.
► Go to bhf.org.uk/healthunlocked to join our online community HealthUnlocked and talk to other people with heart conditions.

Warm-up exercises

to get ready for your workout

Prepare your body for exercise and get the most out of your activity with this routine from a cardiac rehab expert

A gradual warm-up can safely widen your blood vessels and increase your heart rate and blood pressure. This ensures your heart muscle receives plenty of oxygen-rich blood before you start your workout.

If you have a cardiovascular disease, such as chest pain (angina), heart failure or an abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia), it's important to warm up for at least 15 minutes before more intense activity. It also prepares your muscles and joints, increasing flexibility and reducing the risk of injury.

Here are three exercises you can try, either standing, sitting, or a mix of both. Go to [bhf.org.uk/warm-up](https://www.bhf.org.uk/warm-up) for the full routine.

Check with your doctor first if you have a heart or circulatory condition, or think these exercises could worsen an existing medical issue or injury.



Hara Markos
Cardiac Rehabilitation Exercise Practitioner, Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust



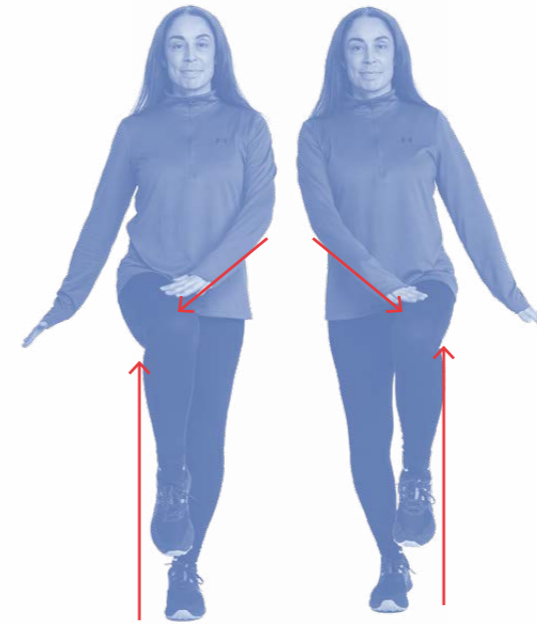
PHOTOGRAPHY: TIM BEKIR

Foot pedals and bicep curls

- 1 Sit or stand with your feet hip-width apart and your arms by your sides.
- 2 Lift your right heel off the floor, keeping your toes on the ground, while curling your left arm towards your shoulder.
- 3 Lower your right heel and left arm.
- 4 As you lift your left heel off the floor, curl your right arm.
- 5 Lower your left heel and right arm.
- 6 Repeat 16 to 20 times on both sides.

Next step: Raise both heels at the same time to perform a calf raise.

Tip: While warming up, you should feel a bit warmer but still able to talk easily. To keep your heart rate up, gently march on the spot between exercises.



Knee raises with hand taps

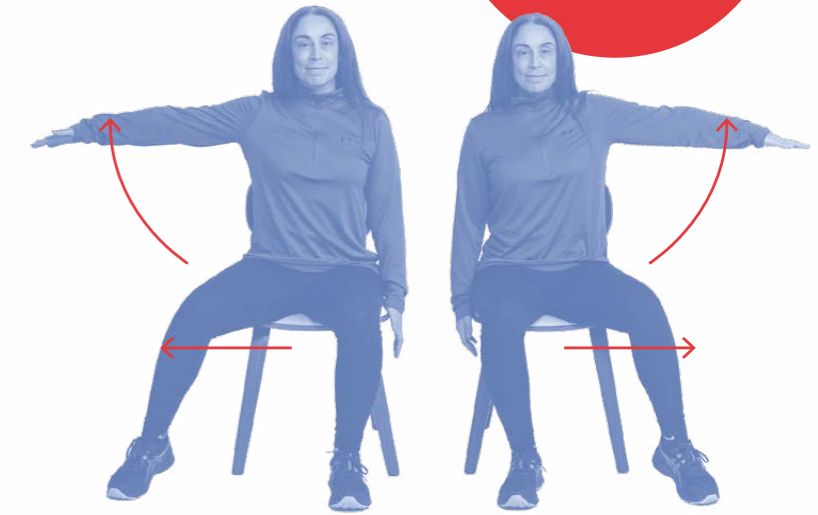
- 1 Sit or stand with your feet hip-width apart and your arms by your sides.
- 2 Lift your right knee, keeping your back straight, and tap the top of your thigh with your left hand.
- 3 Gradually lower your leg and return your hand to the side.
- 4 Lift your left knee and tap your thigh with your right hand.
- 5 Return to the starting position.
- 6 Repeat 16 to 20 times on both sides.

Next step: As you lift each knee, make a fist and punch your opposite hand forwards.



Try the full 15-minute workout

► For more exercises and a follow-along video, scan the QR code on the left with your phone or visit [bhf.org.uk/warm-up](https://www.bhf.org.uk/warm-up)



Part 1
Look out for part 2 with a cool-down routine in the next issue of Heart Matters.

Side taps with alternating side raises

- 1 Sit or stand with your feet hip-width apart and your arms by your sides.
- 2 Step your right foot out to the side and tap your toes on the floor, while raising your right arm straight out to the side.
- 3 Step back to the centre and lower your right arm.
- 4 Step your left foot out to the side, tap your toes on the floor and raise your left arm to the side.
- 5 Return to the starting position.
- 6 Repeat 16 to 20 times on both sides.

Next step: Raise both arms at the same time as you tap each leg out to the side. ●



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Q&A



Science

Consultant cardiothoracic surgeon, Professor Akowuah shows how he uses robotic surgery equipment (left and right)



“Using robots routinely... would be a gamechanger”

What's next in ... heart valve surgery

Robotic and keyhole procedures should help people get back to their lives sooner, says **Professor Enoch Akowuah** from South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Q: Why do more people need heart valve surgery?

A: Every year, more than 15,000 people in the UK need heart valve surgery to repair or replace their valve. This figure has risen significantly in the last 10 years and is likely to keep increasing. This is because heart valve disease is being detected earlier, thanks to greater awareness of symptoms and scans for other conditions

picking up problems by accident. At the same time, people are living longer, and heart valves naturally weaken over time, meaning more people will need treatment.

Q: What will surgery and aftercare look like 10 years from now?

A: NHS England aims to be carrying out half a million robotic operations a year by 2035. Robots designed for heart surgery,

including valve procedures, are due to arrive in the UK in 2026. With a surgeon guiding its arms using a 3D screen and controllers, a robot makes it possible to perform procedures through cuts less than 1cm long in the side of the chest – offering a new minimally invasive alternative to open heart surgery.

Using robots routinely for heart operations would be a gamechanger. It could mean

waking up sooner after surgery and not needing an intensive care stay. You could even return to work within a week. It's likely that robotic assistance will also make heart surgery faster, allowing more people to be treated.

Remote robotic surgery, called telesurgery, could become commonplace too, allowing surgeons to operate on patients without needing to be in the same room – or even the same country.

Researchers are also looking at new types of plastics called SEBS (styrene-ethylene-butylene-styrene) polymers to make replacement valves, as an alternative to the biological and mechanical valves used today.

These new plastics would stop the need for blood-thinning medicines. They are also highly durable, flexible and non-toxic,

which would help reduce the need for further procedures.

Q: Are there currently any alternatives to open heart surgery?

A: Yes. My research, funded by British Heart Foundation, looks at how well two types of keyhole procedures work in the long term compared to open heart surgery.

Transcatheter edge-to-edge repair (TEER) is used to repair a leaky mitral valve. And valve-in-valve transcatheter aortic valve replacement (ViV-TAVR) is where a new biological valve is attached inside the old one, sometimes called the 'Russian Doll' technique.

The benefits of keyhole procedures are smaller wounds, meaning less pain, less chance of infection and faster recovery. But it's not clear whether they work as well in the long term. My research

is monitoring people from different countries who have agreed to take part in the study, and have been randomly allocated either a keyhole procedure or open heart surgery. They will have regular scans and appointments for up to five years after their treatment to see if they develop issues or need additional procedures.

This data will help patients choose the option that's right for them. It could also impact the way doctors all over the world treat heart valve problems.

Q: Why do we need to improve heart valve surgery?

A: So that we can help people have a faster recovery, reduce their risk of problems after the procedure, and ease pressure on the NHS by reducing waiting lists. Currently, it can take about six months from being diagnosed to having an operation and completing cardiac rehab. I want to see people get back to their lives sooner, and need fewer procedures in their lifetime. ●

PHOTOGRAPHY: OLLIE HOLDER

Fact or fiction?

We fact-check media reports on heart health so you have the full story

Statins: what side effects are caused by the medicine?

Although statins can lower 'bad' cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of having a heart attack and stroke, some people are reluctant to take them because they've heard they come with a lot of possible side effects.

But most of these are not actually caused by statins, according to a study funded by British Heart Foundation (BHF). Published in *The Lancet* in February, the research found that statins may not cause 62 out of 66 commonly listed side effects on statin information leaflets, including weight gain, sleep problems, erectile dysfunction and memory loss.

Across 19 randomised trials with nearly 124,000 people in total, those taking a dummy pill containing no medicine were as likely to report side effects as those taking a real statin for an average of four-and-a-half years.

This type of trial is the gold standard for measuring the effects of any treatment.

The reason people may report symptoms while taking a dummy pill is due to a psychological effect called the 'nocebo effect'. This is when you expect a new treatment to cause certain side effects, causing you to experience them.

The study found the only symptoms slightly more common in people taking statins compared to dummy pills were unusual liver blood test results (but not liver disease), urine changes, and swollen feet, legs and ankles (oedema).

The study did not investigate whether statins raised the risk of diabetes, muscle pain or other muscle diseases, such as myopathy, which are already known to be rare side effects.

The researchers say the side effects listed on statin labels are

based on observational studies that did not compare statins with a dummy pill, meaning the results were likely affected by the nocebo effect. They warned that inaccurate information may prevent people from taking statins who would benefit from them.

Many UK news outlets reported on the research, but only the Daily Express included the key detail that the study reviewed randomised control trials, while statin patient information leaflets are based on less reliable observational studies.

OUR VERDICT

This analysis provides more key evidence that statins do not cause many of the reported side effects that may stop people from taking them. It also shows which side effects are truly associated with statins.

“Statins may not cause 62 out of 66 commonly listed side effects”



Can five minutes of exercise twice a day help you get fitter?

Could a few minutes' exercise over the day be enough?

That's what UK newspapers reported last October after a study in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found short bursts of exercise, or 'exercise snacks', improved cardiorespiratory fitness. This is your body's ability to deliver oxygen to your muscles during exercise – a higher level has been linked to a lower risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD).

It reviewed 11 controlled trials, including 414 adults who were not usually active. They exercised for five minutes or less at least twice a day for four to 12 weeks. This mostly involved climbing stairs for under-65s, and leg-strength exercises or tai chi for over-65s, either daily or three days a week.

On average, their cardiorespiratory fitness increased, ranging from a 4.6 per cent to a 17 per cent rise.

Several UK papers covered the study, with the Daily Mail stating: "Just FIVE minutes of intense exercise twice a day can dramatically boost heart health". This was inaccurate – better fitness may lower CVD risk, but the study did not find exercise snacks dramatically boosted heart health.

OUR VERDICT

This study suggests regular five-minute movement breaks like stair climbing may help people who are not physically active get fitter, as it's an easy way to add exercise into their daily routine. However, check with your GP before trying this if you've not exercised in a while. ●

Find more online

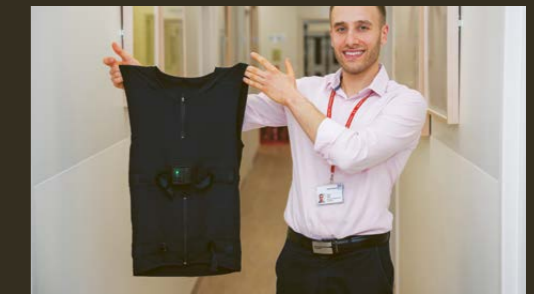
► Other fact-checks include: **Are seed oils good for you?** Go to [bhf.org.uk/factcheck](https://www.bhf.org.uk/factcheck)

Science news

Discover the lifesaving research BHF is funding

T-shirt detects heart conditions

A smart T-shirt with up to 50 sensors could help diagnose inherited heart rhythm conditions. The top – which was developed by a team at Imperial College London, including clinical research fellow Dr Keenan Saleh (below) – can be worn for a week and is more comfortable than a portable ECG (electrocardiogram).



£41m for women's heart health

Nearly £41 million has been pledged for a global research programme to improve the diagnosis and treatment of coronary microvascular disease – which affects the heart's smallest blood vessels – in women. BHF is supporting the **VISIBLE** initiative, which is led by Wellcome Leap and jointly funded by Pivotal Ventures.

Device may ease heart failure

A pacemaker could reverse heart failure symptoms by changing the heart's preferred fuel when in failure. A University of Oxford study found that a cardiac resynchronisation therapy (CRT) device helped the heart switch from sugar to more efficient fat.



British Heart
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