



This literature is produced as an acknowledgement of the life and work of Desmond and Hildergard Atherton. Desmond worked as a GP in Coventry and Hildergard was a founder Trustee of Coventry Churches Housing Association (now Touchstone Housing Association) and The ExtraCare Charitable Trust. Desmond's strength and patience towards those in his care and Hildergard's commitment and support to our charity's work have influenced the development of well-being service that is now benefiting our residents.

### Reduce fat and cholesterol:

experts agree that too much is not good for you! Saturated fats are found in meat, cheese, milk, eggs, butter and lard. Avoid fried foods, creamy soups and sauces, high-fat snacks, pastries and cakes. Do not smother vegetables with butter. Use small amounts of low-fat spreads and salad dressings that are based on unsaturated fats.

### Take moderate exercise:

regular exercise is great for your heart; it helps to increase the amount of good cholesterol we produce which in turn helps to reduce blood pressure and relieves stress and tension.



Take extra care of your  
heart



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## What is heart disease?

The heart is a powerful muscle that acts like a pump and sends oxygen-rich blood around the body from its left chamber, while the right side sends blood from the body to the lungs to be refilled with oxygen. The heart muscle itself needs oxygen and food to maintain the pumping action; this is provided by blood through the coronary arteries, and should anything affect the flow of blood, the heart pumps less effectively. These arteries can become hardened and narrowed, causing partial blockage which in turn can cause angina. If they become blocked totally it results in a heart attack.

## Who is at risk?

Coronary heart disease causes approximately 1 in 4 deaths in men and 1 in 5 in women - and in women it causes twice as many deaths as cancer. In fact, many women do not realise they are at risk as they get older. People still think it's a man's disease - but in 1994/5 almost 39,000 women were admitted to hospital in England after a heart attack and it is estimated that 2 women in every 100 have angina. With so much known about heart disease, you can reduce your risk of developing the disease or a further attack.

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## So what causes heart disease?

Some experts suggest there are causes yet to be discovered. Many contributing factors are already known. Some, such as our age, gender or genetic makeup cannot be avoided but other contributing factors we can do something about. High blood pressure, high cholesterol levels in the blood, being overweight, smoking, a poor diet, lack of exercise and excessive alcohol are all contributing factors.

High blood pressure causes the heart to work harder and this causes additional strain both on the heart and the arteries. If left unchecked, high blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease, angina and heart attack. So remember, have your blood pressure checked regularly.

## Diabetes

Increases the likelihood of heart disease so it's important to maintain regular health checks and maintain a healthy diet.

## Weight distribution

Studies have shown that the distribution of body fat in people who are overweight seems to influence the risk of heart disease. 'Apple shaped' people carry excess fat around their waist which increases the pressure on the heart. It is this pattern of weight distribution that is most commonly associated with heart disease, increased blood cholesterol levels and diabetes.

## Stop smoking:

Smoking increases the risk of coronary heart disease and continuing to smoke after a heart attack doubles the risk of a further attack. Research shows that the risk of suffering from heart disease is cut in half within a year of giving up smoking so it's certainly worthwhile.

## Modify your diet:

Maintain a healthy diet and aim to eat five portions of fruit and veg daily. They support the body's defence system and research has shown they have a positive effect on the heart. Reduce the amount of saturated fats - these are found in dairy and meat produce, and reduce salt-laden products.

One third of what we eat should be made up of rice, pasta, bread and potatoes. Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid a day - water should be the primary choice. Fruit juice, fruit and herb infusions and tea are all feasible alternatives to water; coffee should be limited to 2 or 3 cups a day.

## Alleviate stress:

Make time to relax, try and take as much sleep as you feel you need, take up a new hobby or exercise routine, or treat yourself to a massage - they are all great ways to bust stress!

