This guide will help you and your family better understand:

- your heart health
- your treatment and medication
- your relationship with your healthcare professional such as your doctor or nurse
- what is ideal care, and
- how to stay healthy now that you have left hospital and returned home.

The good news is that many more patients are now surviving a heart attack. However, the risk of a second heart attack remains high, and is likely to be higher than for someone who has not had a heart attack.

It is therefore very important to ensure that you, as someone at higher than average risk, do all you can to reduce the risk of a future heart attack.

This guide will help you to:

**Learn about ...**
what a heart attack is,

**Take control...**
of your heart health, and

**Live life...**
to the full after a heart attack.
Learn about... heart attacks (also called myocardial infarction and shortened to 'MI')

The period after a heart attack is a worrying time for you and your family, and you are likely to have many questions about what happens next.

The aim of this guide is to try to answer as many of your questions as possible, but it is extremely important to discuss these with your doctor and/or nurse as they will best understand your personal circumstances.

Of the many questions you probably have, the first is often ‘what is a myocardial infarction?’ closely followed by ‘what does it mean for my future?’

Your heart is essentially a large muscle pumping blood around the body. A heart attack typically occurs when part of the heart muscle is starved of the oxygen it needs to work properly. This can often result in damage to part of the muscle and means that your heart may not work as well as it did before.

Learn about... my medication

Your doctor will prescribe a course of medication for you. Doctors and nurses sometimes refer to these as ‘therapeutic interventions’.

The words and phrases used by doctors and nurses to explain what has happened to you may be unfamiliar. While this guide will explain some commonly used medical terms, if there is something that you or your family do not understand, you should feel able to ask questions. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to explain any words or phrases that you do not understand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medications that can reduce your risk of having a second heart attack include:</th>
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<td><strong>Beta-blocker</strong></td>
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<td><strong>ACE inhibitor</strong></td>
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People who have had a heart attack often ask the following questions, which you may also find useful:

- How many tablets do I need to take?
- How often do I need to take my tablets?
- What time of day do I need to take my tablets?
- Do I need to take my tablets with food or on an empty stomach?
- How long do I need to take my medication for?
- What happens if I miss a dose?
- How can I make sure that I don’t miss a dose?

When you think of a question, it can often be helpful to write it down so that you don’t forget to ask your doctor or nurse the next time you see them. Your friends or family are also likely to want to know what is happening, so think about asking them to go with you when you next visit your doctor or nurse.

If you experience any problems while taking your medication, you should speak to your doctor or nurse immediately. It is extremely important that you don’t stop taking any medication without first discussing any problems that you have with your doctor or nurse.

Learn about... my measurements and future targets

While you were in hospital recovering from your heart attack, your doctor or nurse will have measured:

- **YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE**
- **YOUR CHOLESTEROL**
- **YOUR BLOOD SUGAR**
- **YOUR WEIGHT AND SHAPE**

These measurements were taken so that your doctors can decide the best course of treatment for you. When you left hospital, your doctor or nurse will have explained to you what happens next. They will have spoken to you about the results of the tests you have had, explain the likely next steps in your care and how they affect your heart health.

At your GP appointment, you will be advised about the ideal targets for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, weight, shape and which targets are right for you. Remember that while it can be important to have targets to aim for, it is more important to make progress in the right direction.

Any positive steps that you are able to take towards reaching these ‘ideal’ targets can make a real difference to improving your heart health and reducing your risk of a future heart attack.

- **BLOOD PRESSURE**
  Your ideal blood pressure target should be less than 130/80mmHg.

- **CHOLESTEROL**
  Your ideal cholesterol target is:
  - Total-cholesterol less than 4mmol/L
  - ‘Bad’ LDL less than 2.0mmol/L
  - ‘Good’ HDL greater than 1.0mmol/L for males and greater than 1.2mmol/L for females

- **BLOOD SUGAR**
  Your ideal blood sugar levels should be HbA1c less than 6.5%.

- **WEIGHT AND SHAPE**
  Everybody is a different shape and size. While it is important to know how much you weigh and to monitor your weight, it is better to measure your waist circumference in order to assess your central body fat.

  Depending on your ethnic background the waist circumference you should aim for is:
  - **EUROPEANS/AFRO-CARIBBEANS**
    - MALE less than 94cm
    - FEMALE less than 80cm
  - **SOUTH ASIANS & CHINESE**
    - MALE less than 90cm
    - FEMALE less than 80cm

  Later in this guide there are a number of helpful suggestions that may help you to make these changes. As with progress towards your treatment targets, small positive changes are far easier to make at the beginning and your chances of maintaining them are far greater. Once you have adjusted to them, you can build on this success gradually over time.
When you leave hospital, you will have been given a copy of your 'discharge summary'. Your discharge summary contains all the information needed by your GP or nurse so that they understand the treatment you received while in hospital.

Ensure you know when your next appointment with your GP or hospital doctor is scheduled.

You can use this table to keep track of the medication your doctor prescribes for you.

If you have any questions about your medication, please ask your doctor.

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**Take control ... of my medication and follow-up appointments**

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**MY MEDICATION**

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**Take control ... of my targets**

You can use this page to track your progress during each visit to your GP. Note down your measurements in the table as you discuss them at each appointment.

**MY BLOOD PRESSURE, TOTAL CHOLESTEROL AND WEIGHT**

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<th>DATE</th>
<th>BLOOD PRESSURE</th>
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Following your heart attack, you will need time to recover, especially if you have had surgery while in hospital. However it is important for you to get back to living your life as soon as possible.

Your doctor will support you to ensure that you really understand the effect of your heart attack. One way to improve your heart health is through a structured exercise programme. This is called ‘cardiac rehabilitation’.

Following your heart attack you may feel worried about doing some of your everyday activities, especially those that involve physical activity. While it is important to begin slowly and to gradually build up your activity levels over a period of weeks and months, it is a great way to improve your heart health.

Having concerns is normal and you should try to talk about your feelings with your family and friends, as well as with your doctor and/or nurse.

As well as talking to you about your concerns and worries, your doctors and nurses will also want to talk to you about:

- your levels of physical activity
- your diet
- your smoking habits
- your sexual relationships
- your weight and shape
- your quality of life
- your plans for returning to work.

Healthy eating
Eating the right kinds of food can go a long way to helping you keep your heart healthy. The good news is that this doesn’t mean boring, flavourless meals. It just involves making a few adjustments and being more careful about what foods you choose to eat.

Top healthy eating tips: 1

- Adopt a Mediterranean-style diet
- Reduce intake of saturated fats e.g. red meat and cheese
- Each day, eat at least 5 portions of different fruit and/or vegetables
- Reduce intake of salty foods and limit your daily intake to 6g per day (about a level teaspoonful). Remember to be aware of hidden salt levels
- Choose wholegrains and high fibre foods
- Each week, eat between 2-4 portions of oily fish, salmon and trout, to provide omega-3 (an essential fatty acid)

For more information:
HEART UK
www.heartuk.org.uk/index.php/?/healthy_living/tasty_recipes
Includes healthy eating fact sheets with nutritional advice and information on a Mediterranean-style diet

British Heart Foundation
http://www.bhf.org.uk/keeping_your_heart_healthy/healthy_eating/heart_healthy_recipes.aspx
Includes heart healthy recipes

The Ismaili Nutrition Centre
www.theismaili.org/nutrition
Includes a library of recipes from Africa, Central and South Asia and the Middle East annotated with nutritional information

Diabetes UK
Includes information on how to manage your everyday diet as well as help you plan for special occasions

Food Standards Agency: Eat Well, Be Well
http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/asksam/healthissues/healthyheart
Includes information on how to alter your diet to help reduce cholesterol and blood pressure levels

Alcohol

It is important to understand the level of your alcohol consumption. If you are unsure of what a unit is, then please visit http://units.nhs.uk/

FEMALE
You are recommended to drink LESS THAN 1-2 units per day

MALE
You are recommended to drink LESS THAN 2-3 units per day

Both men and women should have at least 2 days which are alcohol free per week.

Remember: Even if you don’t drink all week, you cannot ‘save up’ your units and then drink them all in one night. 1
Stopping smoking

If you smoke, you should seriously think about stopping. The good news is that while you were in hospital you would have been smoke free for a number of days.

If you want to stop smoking but are unable to do so alone, speak to your doctor or nurse who will be able to help you contact your local stop smoking service. They will be able to help you access smoking cessation treatments, as well as providing you with motivational support.

To find your local stop smoking service, please visit http://smokefree.nhs.uk/what-suits-me/local-nhs-services/findlocal-nhs-services/ or alternatively you can call the Quitline on: 0800 00 22 00.

Physical activity

Enjoying some form of physical activity for about 20 - 30 minutes per day will help your heart. The good news is that this doesn’t mean that you have to join a gym, it is just important to fit higher levels of physical activity into your lifestyle than before your heart attack. If you have any concerns, talk to your doctor or practice nurse.

To get you started, put some extra effort into everyday activities. For example: walk the dog a little further, walk up the stairs instead of taking the lift or park your car at the far end of the car park when you go shopping.

Build up gradually. Aerobic forms of exercise such as swimming, walking or cycling are all excellent, but don’t worry, they take a while to get used to. Pushing yourself too hard may lead to injury or over-exhaustion.

Stop if you experience any chest pain that does not go away when you rest and contact your doctor or nurse. (It is recommended that you go to the nearest hospital if your chest pain is severe).

More information

This guide has been written for you by the Follow Your Heart partnership. Follow Your Heart is a group consisting of patients who have recovered from a heart attack, doctors, HEART UK, the Primary Care Cardiovascular Society (PCCS) and Pfizer.

The Follow Your Heart partnership has been financially supported by Pfizer.

For further information about the Follow Your Heart partnership please contact:

HEART UK – THE CHOLESTEROL CHARITY
www.heartuk.org.uk or T: 0845 450 5988
e-mail: ask@heartuk.org.uk

PCCS
www.pccs.org.uk or T: 0208 994 8775

PFIZER LIFE
www.pfizerlife.co.uk

For further advice and support following your heart attack please contact:

CARDIAC REHABILITATION
www.cardiac-rehabilitation.net

CHOLESTEROL CAMPAIGN
www.lesscholesterol.co.uk

DIABETES UK
www.diabetes.org.uk or T: 0845 120 2960

THE BLOOD PRESSURE ASSOCIATION
www.bpassoc.org.uk or T: 0845 241 0989 (11am - 3pm, Mon - Fri)

THE BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION
Providing support and guidance on anything heart-related
www.bhf.org.uk or T: 0300 330 3311

References