

What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease is a condition where the **coronary arteries** (that supply blood and oxygen to the heart) become narrowed or hardened by a gradual build-up of fatty material in their walls. This is called **atherosclerosis** and the fatty material is called **atheroma**.

In time, the artery may become so narrow that it cannot deliver enough oxygen-rich blood to the heart muscle when it needs it – such as when you are exercising. The pain and discomfort that you feel as a result is called **angina**.

If the atheroma becomes unstable, it may break off and form a blood clot. If the blood clot blocks the coronary artery, the heart muscle is starved of blood and oxygen, and may become permanently damaged. This is known as a **heart attack** (myocardial infarction).

Cardiovascular disease is also called **heart and circulatory disease**. It means all diseases of the heart and circulation, including coronary heart disease (**angina** and **heart attack**), and **stroke**. Cardiovascular disease is the most common cause of death in the UK and causes more than one in every three deaths¹.

South Asian communities and cardiovascular disease

South Asians in the UK are up to twice as likely to die from cardiovascular disease before the age of 69 than the rest of the UK population². Pakistani men and women and Bangladeshi men have a higher risk than other South Asian groups².

People of South Asian origin also have a higher rate of premature death from **stroke** than the general UK population. And the rates for those born in West Africa and the Caribbean are even higher².

How can you reduce your risk of coronary heart disease?

There are several things you can do to help prevent coronary heart disease, including:

- stopping smoking (see Summary sheet 10)
- controlling your blood pressure (see Summary sheet 7)
- becoming more physically active (see Summary sheet 8)
- eating a healthy, balanced diet (see Summary sheets 12a and 12b)
- reducing your cholesterol (see Summary sheet 12b)
- if you drink alcohol, keeping within the recommended levels (see Summary sheet 7)
- losing weight (if you need to) and maintaining a healthy weight (see Summary sheet 13)
- trying to prevent or control diabetes (see Summary sheets 11 parts a and b)
- learning to deal with stress (see Summary sheet 9).

1. Allender S, Peto V et al. 2008. Coronary Heart Disease Statistics. London: British Heart Foundation.

2. Harding S, Rosato M, Teyhan A. In press. Trends for cardiovascular disease and stroke mortality among migrants in England and Wales, 1979-2003: slow declines notable for some groups. Heart. Published online 3 September 2007. doi:10.1136/hrt.207.122044.

For more information

bhf.org.uk

BHF Heart HelpLine: 0300 330 3311 (local rate number) – for information and support on anything related to heart health. This service is available in English only.

BHF DVDs:

Living to prevent heart disease (aimed at South Asians, with soundtracks in English and five South Asian languages)

Risking it (English soundtrack and subtitles)

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