



Looking after your heart
Your personal support pack
From the European Society of Cardiology



This booklet is not a substitute for the information your own doctor may give you, based on his or her knowledge of your condition.

For more information about the EuroAction Programme, contact:

EuroAction Nurse
EuroAction Programme
Cardiac Investigations
Stoke Mandeville Hospital
Mandeville Road
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire HP21 8AL



Why me?

We have sent you this booklet because you are a close blood relative – a brother, sister, son or daughter – of someone who has developed coronary heart disease early in life.

The fact that a close relative of yours has developed heart disease at an early age means that you might be at high risk of coronary heart disease too. This doesn't mean that you will get heart disease. But it does mean that you are more likely to get it than the average person in this country.

The good news is that there is a lot you can do to reduce your risk of developing heart disease. And, if you already have heart disease – for example if you get angina or if you have had a heart attack – you can reduce your risk of having further heart problems.

This booklet:

- explains what it means to be a member of a family at higher risk of coronary heart disease
- tells you more about all the 'risk factors' for heart disease – the things that increase your risk of getting heart disease
- explains what you and your doctor can do to help prevent you getting heart disease or, if you already have heart disease, what you can do to reduce your risk of further heart problems.



What you need to know about coronary heart disease

What is coronary heart disease?

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood around your body. The heart muscle is supplied with blood and oxygen by arteries called 'coronary arteries'. In people with coronary heart disease, these arteries become furred up with fatty deposits called 'atheroma'. Over time, these can harden in a process called 'atherosclerosis'. This can lead to angina or a heart attack.

Risk factors for coronary heart disease

Your 'lifestyle' can increase your risk of developing heart disease. Smoking, unhealthy eating, and being physically inactive can all lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes, and to fatty deposits developing in your arteries.

The main 'risk factors' for coronary heart disease are listed in the box on the next page. All of these risk factors are ones you can change. You may need your doctor's help with some of them. Even small changes can make a BIG difference to your health.

Why is there a higher risk of heart disease in my family?

When one member of a family gets coronary heart disease at an early age, there is an increased risk that other members of the family may get heart disease too.

People who have grown up in the same family household may have shared the same or similar 'lifestyle habits' – for example smoking, or eating unhealthily, or being physically inactive. You may have continued with these habits all your life. Changing some of these lifestyle factors now can help you to reduce your risk of getting coronary heart disease in the future. And it will help other members of your family too.

Some families inherit high blood cholesterol which increases the risk of early coronary heart disease. Your doctor can help you find out if your family is affected.

The risk factors for coronary heart disease

Risk factors you CAN change

- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ Unhealthy eating habits
- ✓ Being physically inactive
- ✓ Being overweight
- ✓ High blood pressure
- ✓ High cholesterol
- ✓ Diabetes



How the EuroAction Programme can help

We tell you more about how you can change your lifestyle and about the risk factors for coronary heart disease on pages 8–15. Here we explain what the EuroAction Programme involves.



1 First assessment

The first stage is to have an assessment to find out about your personal risk factors.

Fill in the *EuroAction Questionnaire* enclosed with this booklet. You will need to answer some of the questions yourself – about whether you smoke, how well you eat, and how much physical activity you do – and then make an appointment with your doctor so that he or she can answer the other questions.

Your doctor will:

- measure your weight, height and around your middle
- measure your blood pressure, and
- do a blood test to find out your cholesterol level and your glucose level. (The glucose level test is to find out if you have diabetes.)

When your doctor has written all the results onto the questionnaire, please send the questionnaire to the EuroAction nurse using the envelope provided.



2 Work to reduce your risk factors

Once your doctor has completed your assessment you will be able to see which risk factors you need to concentrate on.

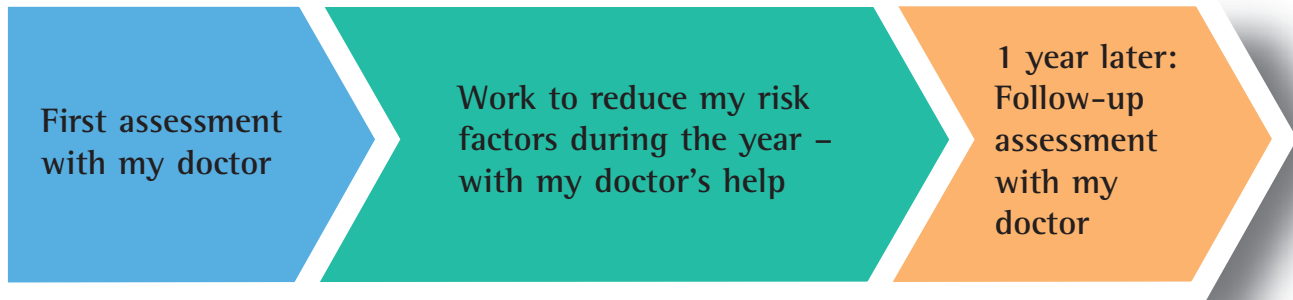
Your doctor may be able to help you. For example, if you are a smoker your doctor may be able to give you a prescription for nicotine replacement therapy. If you are overweight, he or she may be able to refer you to another health professional for advice on how to lose weight. If you are not physically active at the moment, you might be offered advice on how to build up your level gradually so that you are exercising at a level that's safe and right for you.

There is a lot you can do by yourself too. On pages 8–15 of this booklet we have given you some more ideas on what you can do to reduce your risk factors.



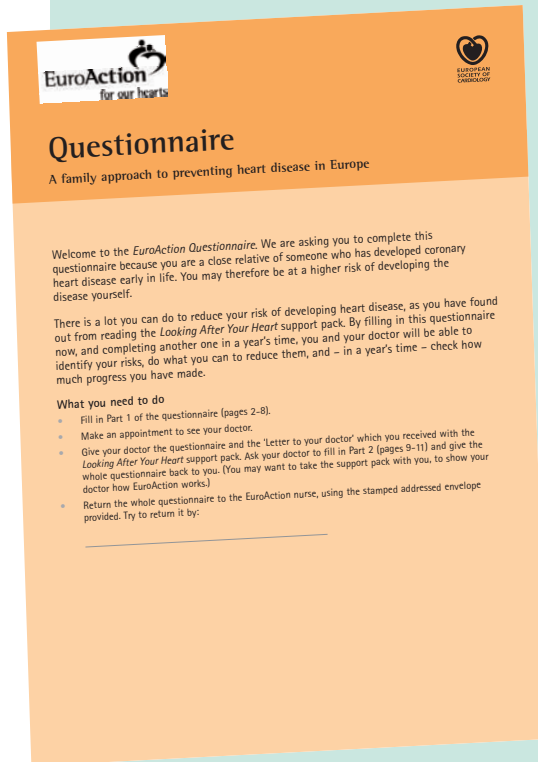
Follow-up assessment

Twelve months after your first assessment, you will be asked to fill in the same questionnaire again. We will ask your doctor to do the same tests as before too. You will then be able to see how successful you have been in reducing your risk of coronary heart disease.



Questions and answers about EuroAction

What do I have to do with the *EuroAction Questionnaire*?



- Fill in Part 1 of the *EuroAction Questionnaire* in the back pocket of this booklet.

- Make an appointment to see your doctor.

- Give your doctor the questionnaire and the enclosed 'Letter to your doctor'. Ask him or her to fill in Part 2 of the questionnaire.

- Send the completed questionnaire to the EuroAction nurse, using the stamped addressed envelope provided.

- Ask your doctor to tell you what risk factors you need to work on and what you can do about them.

If you have any questions you can contact the EuroAction nurse. The address is on the inside front cover of this booklet.

When do I need to complete the questionnaire by?

It's best if you do it as soon as possible, but no later than the date shown on the questionnaire.

What if I already have coronary heart disease (if you have angina or have had a heart attack)? Is it still worth my while filling in the questionnaire?

Yes. There is still a lot you can do to prevent future problems with your heart by reducing your risk factors for coronary heart disease.

What happens if my doctor says he or she won't do the extra tests?

In this pack there is a letter you can give to your doctor explaining all about EuroAction. Remember to give it to your doctor as it will help him or her to understand how important it is to screen you for risk factors for coronary heart disease. If your doctor is still unwilling to carry out the tests, it may be possible for you to find another doctor. Or, you could ask the EuroAction nurse to talk to your doctor about EuroAction.

Will I be contacted by EuroAction again?

Yes. You will receive another questionnaire in a year's time. You can always contact the EuroAction nurse if you are experiencing difficulties or if you have problems. It is in your interest to look after your heart for the rest of your life. So work hard with your doctor to achieve your targets and we look forward to hearing from you in a year.

Where can I find out more about EuroAction?

You can read more about EuroAction on the European Society of Cardiology website (www.escardio.org), or you can contact the EuroAction nurse. (The address is on the inside front cover.)

What you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease

Quitting smoking



If you're a smoker, quitting smoking is the single most important thing you can do to avoid future heart problems.

How to quit

It is important to stop completely. Cutting down is less likely to work than stopping altogether. There is no quick and easy way to quit, so prepare yourself thoroughly and find out about what help is available. See the *Tips to help you quit*, on the next page.

How does smoking cause heart disease?

- Smoking damages the linings of your arteries.
- Nicotine, which is the addictive drug in cigarettes, increases your heart rate and your blood pressure, making your heart work harder.
- When you smoke, carbon monoxide is carried in your blood instead of oxygen, making it harder for your heart to get enough oxygen.

Target

No smoking

Tips to help you quit

- ✓ Be positive.
- ✓ Join a stop smoking clinic.
- ✓ Ask your doctor about nicotine replacement therapy, or Zyban (bupropion). Zyban is a medicine which does not contain nicotine but which helps to reduce the desire to smoke, and to relieve some of the symptoms you might get when you stop smoking.
- ✓ Write a list of your reasons for quitting. You can use the space below.
- ✓ Tell your friends and family that you are planning to quit.
- ✓ Set a date and get rid of cigarettes and ashtrays.
- ✓ Keep busy. Boredom can make you smoke.
- ✓ Keep active. Try to do some physical activity every day.
- ✓ Save the money you would have spent on cigarettes and reward yourself.
- ✓ If you have a weak moment call a friend or someone you know who can give you support.
- ✓ Don't give up on giving up!

For help and advice with quitting smoking, call Quitline on 0800 00 22 00 or the NHS Smoking Helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

My reasons for quitting smoking:

Healthy eating for the heart

Eating healthily can reduce the risk of heart disease. So be positive, read on, and start thinking about ways of improving your diet and your lifestyle.

Target

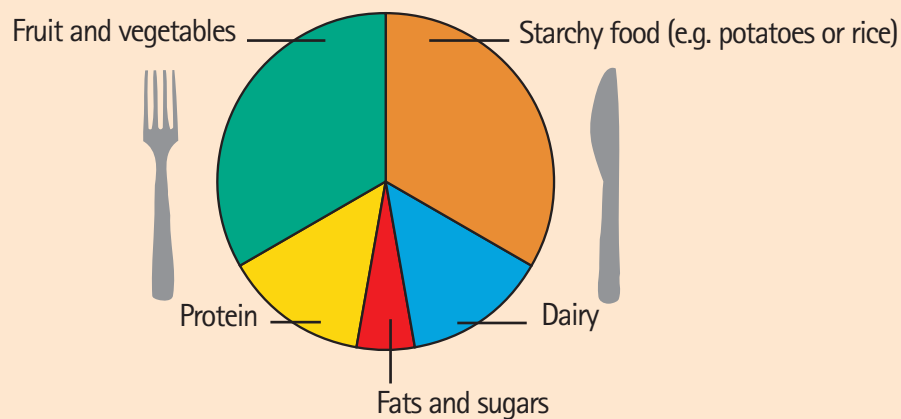
You can use some of the ideas in the *Tips for healthy eating* box opposite.

Tips for healthy eating

- ✓ Replace saturated fat with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat. (For example, use polyunsaturated margarine rather than butter, and use rapeseed or olive or sunflower oil rather than coconut oil or palm oil.) And eat less fat in total.
- ✓ Increase the amount of oily fish you eat. Oily fish includes mackerel, sardines and pilchards.
- ✓ Eat more fruit and vegetables. Aim to eat at least five portions a day.
- ✓ Eat more fibre – especially soluble fibre that is found for example in beans, peas, lentils and oats.
- ✓ Avoid using too much salt. Use herbs, spices, lemon or garlic to flavour your food instead.
- ✓ Avoid using too much sugar, or having too many sugary foods and drinks.
- ✓ Keep your alcohol intake within the recommended limits.



Aim for this healthy balance of foods in your overall diet.



Tips

- ✓ Cook more vegetables than you would normally prepare.
- ✓ Put the vegetables on your plate first so that they take up almost half the plate.
- ✓ Then put on the starchy food – for example the potatoes or rice.
- ✓ Put the meat or cheese part of the meal on last. This will help you reduce the amount of these products that you eat.

Physical activity and exercise

Being physically active can help reduce your risk of heart disease.

How physical activity can help

- Physical activity improves the flow of blood around your body.
- It helps to control your weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood glucose.
- It helps to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.
- It reduces stress, anxiety and depression and gives you a sense of well-being.

What type of activity should I do?

Some of the best activities for your heart are walking, cycling, dancing, and everyday activities such as climbing the stairs. Whatever exercise you choose must always be comfortable and not cause you any pain.

How much is enough?

Moderate exercise is best. You should feel comfortable but slightly out of breath and warm. If you can't carry on a conversation during exercise, you are probably working too hard.

To get fit you need to exercise **frequently and regularly**. Increase your activity gradually and build it into your daily life. Aim to build up eventually to a total of at least 30 minutes' moderate activity a day, on at least 5 days of the week.



Target

A total of 30 minutes' moderate activity a day, on at least 5 days a week.

If you have any health problems or you are unsure, seek advice from your doctor before you start exercising.

A recipe for success!

Try to do this at least five times a week.

- Starter:** Warm up for 10-15 minutes before the main exercise.
- Main course:** Moderate activity such as brisk walking. Start off with 5 minutes and build up week by week to 20-30 minutes.
- Dessert:** Cool down after the main exercise for 10 minutes.

Some important do's and don'ts

Do ...

- ✓ Wear loose, comfortable clothing and shoes with good arch support.
- ✓ Try to exercise before meals. If you can't, wait until at least an hour after you have eaten.
- ✓ If you experience chest pain, feel dizzy or faint, stop exercising and consult your doctor.

Don't ...

- ✗ Don't over-exert yourself. You will get more benefit from moderate exercise than from vigorous exercise.
- ✗ Don't exercise while you are ill or have a temperature – for example with a cold, cough or flu.

Keeping to a healthy shape and weight

Keeping to a healthy body weight reduces your risk of heart disease. Two things are important:

- how much you weigh, and
- where your body fat is.

Carrying your body fat around your middle increases your risk of heart disease.

Do you have too much fat around your middle?

Measure around your middle, 2.5 centimetres (1 inch) above your tummy button. If you measure more than the *waist* target in the box above, then it is important to lose some weight from around your middle.

Are you overweight?

Ask your doctor to tell you if you are overweight.

- **If your weight is OK:** Well done. Try to keep to this weight.
- **If you are overweight:** It is important you try to lose weight. Read the helpful *Tips* box opposite.

It is important to aim for a realistic target for weight loss. If you can lose between 5% and 10% of your present weight you will improve your overall health.

Targets

Waist: *Men:* Below 94cm (37 inches)

Women: Below 80cm (31½ inches)

Weight: *Ask your doctor what your target weight is.*

Tips

- ✓ Try to eat regular meals.
- ✓ Choose low fat products. Avoid fried foods. When cooking, use as little fat and oil as possible.
- ✓ Eat small servings of meat. Eat chicken and fish more often.
- ✓ Eat a serving of starchy food (for example potatoes or rice) at each meal.
- ✓ Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- ✓ Avoid sugary foods and drinks.
- ✓ Limit how much alcohol you have.
- ✓ Be more physically active.

Blood pressure

Your doctor should help you to make sure that your blood pressure is less than 140/90 – or if you have diabetes, less than 130/85. That's because having blood pressure lower than this helps to protect your heart.

Cholesterol

Your doctor should help you to make sure your blood cholesterol level is less than 5 mmols per litre. That's because having blood cholesterol lower than this helps to protect your heart.

Diabetes and glucose levels

Your doctor should check to see if you have diabetes or impaired glucose tolerance. People with diabetes have a higher risk of coronary heart disease than other people.

If you have diabetes, it is important to control it. Eating a healthy diet and being physically active are important. See the advice on pages 10–13. Your doctor may also give you tablets.

If you have been told that you have 'impaired glucose tolerance' this means that you are at a higher risk of developing diabetes in the future. Ask your doctor to check your blood glucose level once a year.

What can I do?

The advice on pages 8–14 – about not smoking, eating healthily and being physically active – will help you achieve your targets for blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose. It is also important to take any medicines your doctor prescribes.

Targets

Blood pressure	Below 140/90.
<i>Or, if you have diabetes:</i>	Below 130/85.

Cholesterol	
Total cholesterol:	Below 5 mmols per litre

LDL cholesterol:	Below 3 mmols per litre
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Fasting blood glucose level	
Below 6.1 mmols per litre	

We hope you find this booklet useful and that it will help you to keep your heart as healthy as possible.

Look after your heart. *Stop smoking, eat healthily and be more physically active.*



If you are feeling anxious...

You may feel anxious about receiving this support pack. But remember that if you are at increased risk of heart disease this is more likely to be associated with lifestyle factors – whether you smoke, your eating habits, and how much physical activity you do – rather than with hereditary factors.

There's a lot you can do to reduce your risk, as you have found out from reading this booklet. If you do feel anxious or would like to talk over your feelings, your own doctor should be able to help you. Or you can contact the EuroAction nurse. The address is on the inside front cover.

In this pocket there is a questionnaire, a letter for your doctor, and a stamped addressed envelope.

- Fill in Part 1 of the questionnaire.
- Make an appointment to see your doctor.
- Give your doctor the questionnaire and the letter. Ask him or her to fill in Part 2 of the questionnaire and give the whole questionnaire back to you.
- Return the completed questionnaire to the EuroAction nurse, using the stamped addressed envelope provided.

EuroAction Programme

The EuroAction Programme aims to help you, your partner and your relatives
to reduce the risk of heart disease in your family.



EUROPEAN
SOCIETY OF
CARDIOLOGY

EuroAction is an initiative of the European Society of Cardiology
to prevent cardiovascular disease across Europe.

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