



Supporting your teams heart health

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Workplace

Health and Wellbeing **Academy**

Introduction.

Here we'll explain what heart health is, how the workplace can impact the heart health of your employees and what you can do to help.



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Heart health and conditions

Work impacts on heart health

Top tips for healthy hearts

Supporting people with heart conditions



What is heart health?

Heart health refers to how well your heart and blood vessels pump blood around your body. Having a healthy heart can help you to live a longer and healthier life. Heart health is really important; in the UK, coronary heart disease is one of the leading causes of death².



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²UK factsheet. British Heart Foundation. www.bhf.org.uk, updated March 2021.



What are the most common heart conditions?

There are lots of different conditions that can affect your heart. This could be something you're born with, or something you develop later in life, including:

- coronary heart disease
- arrhythmia (an abnormal heart rhythm)
- congenital heart disease

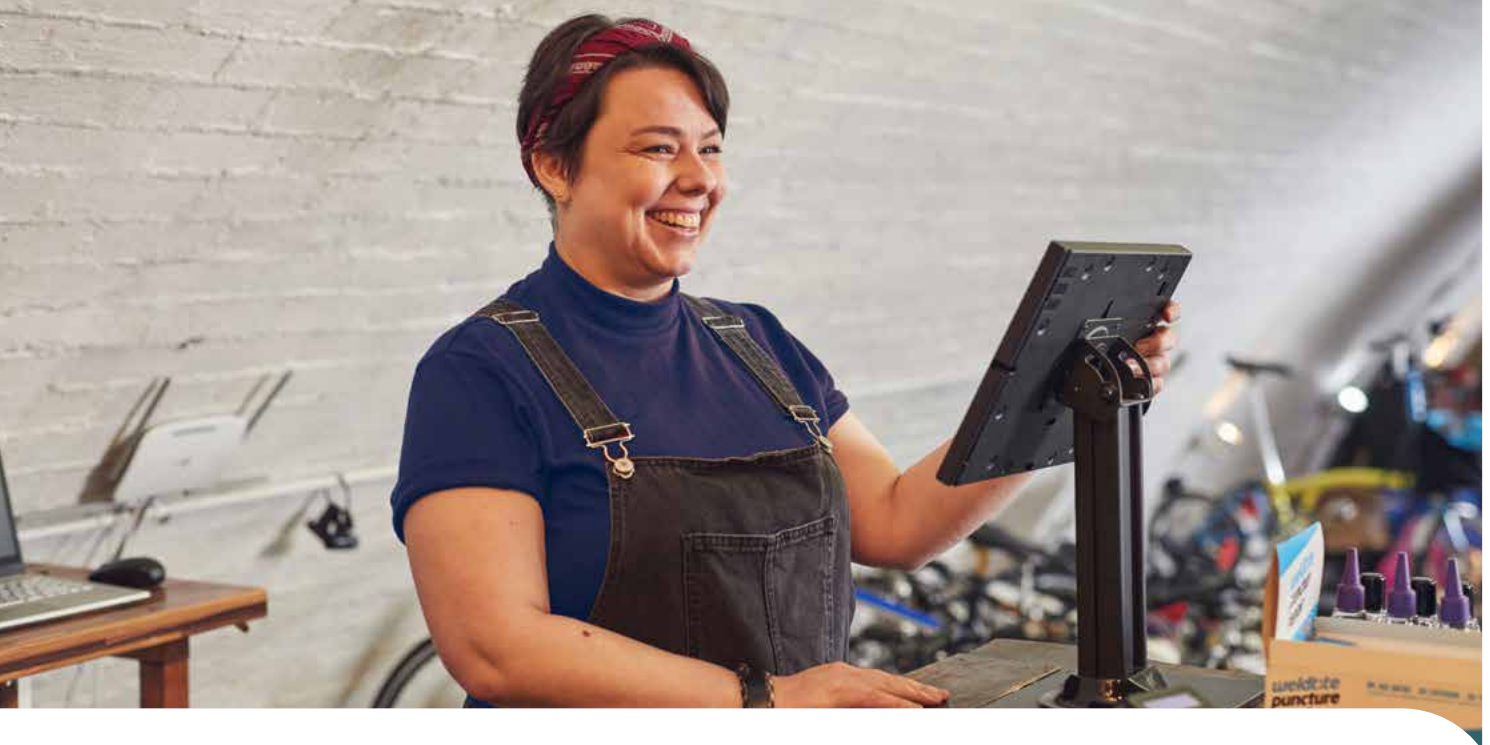
The most common heart condition in the UK is coronary heart disease. It's also the most common cause of heart attacks. In the UK, somebody is admitted to hospital due to a heart attack every five minutes².

People with heart conditions often live with other health conditions, such as diabetes, too.



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²UK factsheet. British Heart Foundation. www.bhf.org.uk, updated March 2021.



How can work impact heart health?

You can develop heart conditions for lots of different reasons. There are some things that make developing a heart condition more likely, and these are known as risk factors. Some of these risk factors can't be controlled, such as your age or genetics. But, some risk factors can be controlled. These include things like your diet, how active you are and whether or not you smoke.

As a manager, it's good to be aware of how work could be affecting the heart health of you and your team. This way you can take steps to create a healthy workplace.

Feeling stressed

You might feel stressed at work from time-to-time, but constant stress can impact your heart health. This is because it can trigger unhealthy behaviours such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol or eating too much fat and sugar. For many people, the stress they experience due to work will have increased since the pandemic. This could be because of having to manage childcare while working, being worried about household finances or having more work to do.



Some risk factors of developing a heart condition can't be controlled, such as your age or genetics.



Being inactive

Not doing enough exercise is linked to conditions like heart attack and stroke. If you work at a desk or spend a lot of time driving, it can be easy to sit still for long periods of time without realising.

Roughly a third of adults in England are damaging their health by not being active enough⁸.



Eating unhealthily

Eating too much saturated fat and salt is bad for your heart. And, whether you're in the office, on site or at home, working can have a big impact on your eating habits. Crisps and chocolate in vending machines, limited canteen options and not taking a lunch break can all cause you to make unhealthy choices.



Breathing in polluted air

Air pollution can be harmful to your heart and circulation. If you work outside, you're more likely to breathe in polluted air. This includes drivers, builders and maintenance workers. You might also be exposed to air pollution if you commute through busy areas.

Roughly a third of adults in England are damaging their health by not being active enough⁸.

⁸Physical Activity, Healthy Eating and Healthier Weight: A Toolkit for Employers. Business in the Community. www.bitc.org.uk, published 29 October 2019.



Five top tips for encouraging healthy hearts.

The good news is that there are lots of things you can do to support your team to look after their hearts.

1 Get active

Encourage people to get up and move around every 30 minutes.



Allow people to take calls and remote meetings while they're out on a walk.



Encourage walking and cycling to work wherever possible.



2 Eat well

- Make sure healthy options are available in the workplace, such as in the canteen or vending machines. Make sure your team have an area and equipment to heat up food from home when possible.
- Encourage your team members to take their lunch breaks away from their desk or workstation.
- Don't cater meetings with unhealthy foods such as cakes and biscuits and avoid focusing social occasions around alcohol.



3 Keep calm

- Make sure your team take regular breaks and finish on time.
- Let your employees know that they can speak to you if their workload becomes unmanageable.
- Be adaptable and allow flexible working hours when working from home if you can, to help your team strike a better work life balance.

4 Avoid pollution

- Highlight routes away from heavy traffic that commuters can use to walk or cycle to work.
- Allow flexible hours where possible so that your team members can avoid commuting at rush hour.
- Make people aware of the UK pollution forecast and encourage them to avoid being outside when pollution levels are high or very high in your local area.



5 Access support

- If you have an Employee Assistance Programme, make sure that people know how to use it and what support is available.
- Consider offering workplace health checks and screenings.
- Encourage people to stop smoking if they do, and signpost them to resources and support groups that could help them.



“ Bupa Dietitian, Rebecca McBride, has some top tips for catering meetings

Choose lower fat, sugar and salt snacks. This includes fresh or dried fruit, unsalted nuts and seeds and popcorn. You could opt for lower sugar granola bars and lower fat crisps and biscuits. If you're providing breakfast, consider offering pancakes, crumpets and wholegrain toast rather than pastries”



How can I support people with heart conditions?

There are over seven million people living with heart and circulatory disease in the UK². By law, you have to make reasonable adjustments so that people living with a heart condition can continue to work if they want to. If somebody in your team makes you aware that they have a heart condition, there are lots of ways you can support them.

- Reassure them that all conversations you have about their health are private and confidential.
- Be understanding if they need to take time off for sickness leave or for medical appointments.
- Where reasonable, let them attend medical appointments during the workday.
- Offer flexible working where possible if this will help them to manage their symptoms.
- Make sure everyone in the team is aware of your sickness policies, how they can access these and who to ask if they have any questions.
- Let them know where they can go for more support, such as occupational health or human resources teams if you have them.

It's important to be sensitive and empathetic to their needs and how they are feeling. If somebody in your team has been diagnosed with a heart condition, it could be scary and upsetting for them, and they might need extra support. People with heart conditions might also need extra support as the pandemic continues.

There might be times when developing a heart condition means somebody isn't able to continue doing the same job as they were doing before. For example, they might not be able to do heavy lifting anymore, or their medication might mean it's unsafe for them to use machinery. If this is the case, meet with them to discuss the ways their role can be adapted.

²UK factsheet. British Heart Foundation. www.bhf.org.uk, updated March 2021.

Resources.

- [Bupa's heart health hub](#)
- [British Heart Foundation](#)

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