By the time we reach adulthood, we’ve already started to develop heart disease: our arteries have already started to ‘fur up’. But how the disease progresses from there is often down to us as individuals – and that’s good news, because it means we can help to control our own heart health.

There are two key ways we can do this:

1. We can reduce our heart risks
   
   Our lifestyle choices directly affect the health of our hearts. The top three ways to protect yourself from heart disease are:

   If you’re a smoker, the very best thing you can do is to **stop smoking** completely, as there’s no safe lower limit. Just a year after quitting, the risk of heart disease is halved\(^1\). And that’s significant, because smokers are almost three times more likely to die from a heart problem than someone who’s never smoked\(^2\).

   The next best thing is to **be active**. You don’t have to join a gym: walking, cycling and swimming are great ways to improve fitness. There’s no minimum level of activity that benefits you, either – it all helps. Regular exercise can strengthen your heart muscle, lower your resting heart rate and blood pressure, help you lose weight, and improve your cholesterol profile\(^3\).

   Third, taking care of your **diet** is vital. It’s best to consume carb-rich foods in moderation (such as bread, pasta and rice); avoid excess alcohol, sugary foods and drinks; and cut down on saturated fats such as those in butter, cheese and fatty meat. Reducing portion sizes and avoiding snacking will help, too. Healthier eating can also help to prevent type 2 diabetes, a leading risk factor for heart disease\(^4\).

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**Source:**
1. [https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/smoking-your-heart](https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/smoking-your-heart)
3. [https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/exercise-for-your-heart-health](https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/exercise-for-your-heart-health)
5. Only leading brands are recommended. Data from wearables can be very helpful to your doctor, but should not be relied upon without the guidance of a medical professional.
2. We can help to monitor our own heart health

Unfortunately, heart conditions tend to develop silently. Most people only know they have a problem when they experience something like a heart attack or stroke. So being aware of our blood pressure and heart rhythms can offer vital early warning signs.

Nowadays, technology is available that’s so simple and inexpensive, you can help to track your own heart health from home. It can fit seamlessly into your life, avoiding the disruption and stress of more traditional methods:

**Smart watches** – Far from being gimmicks, many smart watches can keep track of your activity and monitor your heart rate, provide ECG heart rhythm traces, and even suggest a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation, a serious condition which is a leading cause of stroke. An app can record the trace, which can then be emailed to your doctor.

If wearables aren’t for you, **blood pressure monitors** are priced from around £20. Versions that can also record an ECG trace, and could detect atrial fibrillation, cost from about £80.

Patients with palpitations or infrequent cardiac symptoms have traditionally needed to go to a clinic and be wired up with an ambulatory ECG – a device you carry around with you. Now, however, some of our approved providers can send you a ‘**leadless patch**’ to stick on your chest. This can record your ECG trace for up to two weeks, and then you simply pop it in the post afterwards.

“There’s going to be a huge drive for patients to take ownership of their blood pressure monitoring using home devices. It’s a more accurate reflection of day-to-day blood pressure and allows for more appropriate treatment – potentially saving lives.”

**Future technology**

In future, enhanced artificial intelligence, genetic profiling and more sophisticated blood tests will help to assess individuals’ health risks, and tailor the most potentially successful treatment plan, at a highly personalised level.

For today, there’s still plenty that individuals can do to take care of their heart, increasing their chances of never needing cardiac treatment at all, or at least not until significantly later in life. Easily accessible technology is giving people the power to be aware of their own heart health, enabling them to work with their doctors to prevent disease or to diagnose it much sooner.