

Your Health

 Health Partners

FEBRUARY 2025 NEWSLETTER

HELP YOUR HEART & STRENGTH TRAINING

*Plus a focus on enhancing
your financial wellbeing*



In this issue of **Your Health** we focus on how to help your heart, and how to incorporate strength and resistance training in to your daily routine. Additionally we take an in-depth look at financial wellbeing, including coping with immediate financial stress and improving your long-term situation.

Help Your Heart

BOOSTING YOUR CARDIAC WELLBEING

The heart is the engine of the human body, tirelessly pumping blood and delivering essential nutrients to our tissues. Given its vital role, maintaining heart health is crucial for overall wellbeing and longevity. With cardiovascular disease remaining a leading cause of mortality in the UK and worldwide, taking steps to support your heart is more important than ever.

The heart is the engine of the human body

Good heart health depends on a combination of factors that include genetics, lifestyle choices and the management of underlying health conditions. By understanding these factors, how they interact and what you can influence, you can take informed steps to protect your heart.



KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Understanding and monitoring key health metrics, often referred to as “knowing your numbers”, is a vital aspect of maintaining heart health. These numbers, which include blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar and body mass index (BMI), offer a snapshot of your cardiovascular risk factors. Understanding these values can help detect potential issues early on, allowing for timely interventions and lifestyle adjustments. High blood pressure and elevated cholesterol are significant risk factors for heart disease but often present with no symptoms.

By knowing your numbers, you can work with your healthcare provider to develop a targeted plan to manage these factors through diet, exercise and medication, if necessary, thereby reducing the risk of heart attacks, strokes and other cardiovascular complications. Knowledge is power and in the case of heart health, it could very well save your life.

THE ROLE OF GENETICS

Your genetic makeup can predispose you to certain conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and even specific heart diseases. Understanding your family history is one of the essential parts of assessing your risk factors for cardiovascular issues.

Some heart conditions, like hypertrophic cardiomyopathy or familial hypercholesterolaemia, are directly inherited. Being aware of these conditions can prompt early monitoring and intervention, which can be key to managing them effectively.

Though genetics may predispose you to heart disease, lifestyle factors can influence whether these risks materialise. For example, someone with a genetic predisposition to high cholesterol may need to be particularly vigilant about their diet and exercise regime to help to minimise the risk. Medication can still be necessary to maintain healthy cholesterol levels for some people, despite leading a healthy lifestyle.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES FOR A HEALTHY HEART

- ▶ **Eat heart-healthy foods**
A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats can significantly improve heart health. Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as oily fish, and those rich in antioxidants, like berries, are particularly beneficial. Limiting salt, sugar and saturated fats is also crucial in preventing high blood pressure and cholesterol.
- ▶ **Stay active**
Regular physical activity is essential for keeping your heart strong. The NHS recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise for adults, like brisk walking or cycling, each week. You can also incorporate strength training exercises twice a week to complement your cardiovascular workouts.
- ▶ **Maintain a healthy weight**
Excess weight, particularly around the abdomen, increases the risk of heart disease. Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight through diet and exercise can reduce this risk and relieve the burden on your heart.
- ▶ **Manage blood pressure**
High blood pressure (hypertension) can damage your blood vessels and lead to heart disease. Regular monitoring, reducing salt intake, managing stress and if prescribed, medication, can help control your blood pressure.
- ▶ **Control cholesterol levels**
High levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol can lead to plaque build-up in arteries, while HDL (good) cholesterol helps remove it. A healthy diet and regular exercise can improve your cholesterol profile, and medications may be necessary for some individuals.
- ▶ **Regulate blood sugar**
Diabetes is a major risk factor for heart disease and many people are unaware that they have type 2 diabetes or prediabetes. Maintaining blood sugar levels within a healthy range long term is critical for protecting your heart.
- ▶ **Quit smoking**
Smoking is a significant risk factor for heart disease. Quitting smoking can rapidly reduce your risk and improve overall heart function.



EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND HEART HEALTH

- ▶ **Manage stress**
Chronic stress can negatively impact heart health. Techniques like mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing exercises and yoga can help manage stress levels.
- ▶ **Get enough sleep**
Poor sleep is linked to higher risk of heart disease. Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night. Seek medical advice if you are struggling with poor sleep and self-help measures have not made any difference as it may be necessary to exclude a contributory health condition.

A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats can significantly improve heart health.

Remember, it's never too late to start taking better care of your heart, and even small changes can make a big difference. Embrace a heart-healthy lifestyle and you'll be well on your way to a happier, healthier you.

The NHS has an online [heart age calculator](#) which can give you an idea of how healthy your heart is.

Strength Training

Regardless of our age, there is a wealth of evidence to show that having an active lifestyle can help keep us healthier and happier for longer.

When we think of physical activity, our first thought is usually getting out for a walk or run. There are many benefits to aerobic activities like these, for example lowered blood pressure, improved sleep and boosting brain and immune system function. But, there is another important piece of the physical activity jigsaw – strength training.

Engaging in strength training exercises such as lifting weights, using resistance bands or performing bodyweight exercises like push-ups and squats fortifies muscle fibres. Gradually loading the muscles to work at near-maximum capacity stimulates an increase in muscle mass and efficiency. This results in improved muscle strength, which helps to support joint stability.

Strength training is for everyone – no matter your age, fitness level or goals. It's about building a stronger, healthier and more capable version of yourself. The NHS recommends doing muscle-strengthening activities on two days a week.



THE BENEFITS

Makes us stronger

This may seem obvious, but strength training makes us stronger. The knock-on effect is that performing everyday tasks such as carrying heavy shopping, playing with your children or gardening become easier.

Being stronger can also lower our risk of injury by improving the stability of our joints like the knees and hips, whilst also potentially addressing muscular imbalances. Studies indicate that individuals who engage in regular strength training are 30% less likely to experience chronic back pain compared to those who do not.

Finally, being stronger also helps us have more control over our bodies. This can help prevent falls, becoming more important as we age. It is estimated that for every 10% stronger we get, we reduce our risk of injury by 4%.

Being stronger helps us have more control over our bodies.

Boosts our mental health

Strength training has been linked with increased self-esteem and confidence, which could be attributed to the strength training process helping us overcome challenges and improve our self-belief. These feelings, in turn, improve our mood and reduce anxiety. Like all forms of exercise, strength training also prompts the release of mood-boosting endorphins.

Burns calories efficiently

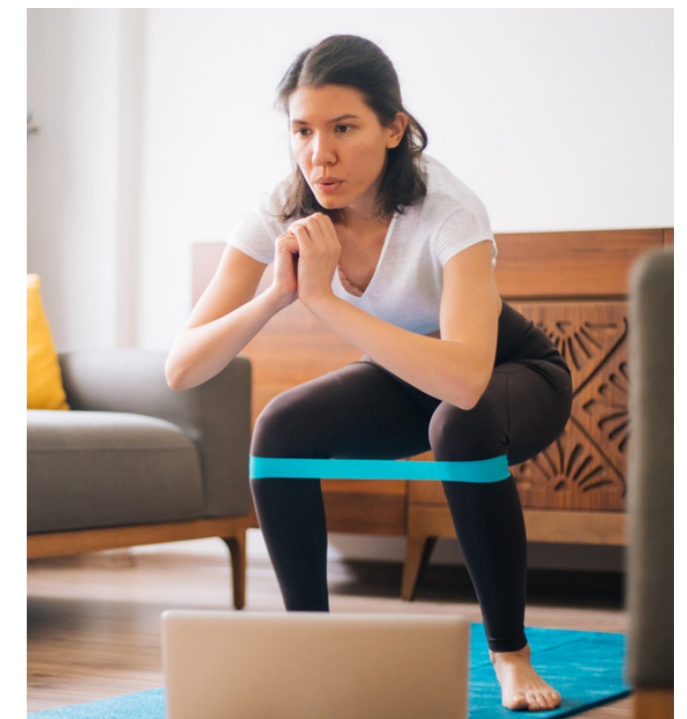
Building muscle boosts your resting metabolic rate (RMR), which means your body burns more calories when at rest.

Protects our brain

There is evidence to suggest that strength training in older age helps to maintain aspects of cognitive function, such as processing speed and memory.

STRENGTH TRAINING TIPS

- ▶ Do not hold your breath as this can increase your blood pressure.
- ▶ Breathe out with the effort of each exercise.
- ▶ Take a break if you cannot talk normally when doing the exercises.
- ▶ Make sure your movements are slow and controlled.
- ▶ Count for 2 seconds for the 'push' and 'release' of each exercise.



WAYS TO INCLUDE STRENGTH AND RESISTANCE TRAINING IN YOUR DAY

Strength training comes in many forms but you don't need fancy equipment or hours at the gym to start. Here's how you can make it part of your routine.

Use your body weight

For beginners, bodyweight exercises like push-ups, squats and lunges are excellent for building a foundation. They're low impact, require no equipment and can be done anywhere. Aim for 10–15 repetitions of each exercise to start. As long as the exercises are somewhat challenging in the last few repetitions, you're strength training.

Learn proper form

It's important to ensure you are performing exercises correctly to avoid injury and maximise results. Consider watching instructional online videos from reputable sources or consulting a certified personal trainer. Remember, the weight doesn't need to be heavy whilst you familiarise yourself with specific exercises. It's important the brain and muscle connection are working well, and you can feel the muscles working.

Start small with weights or resistance bands

If you have access to dumbbells, kettle bells or resistance bands, great! Resistance bands are easy to use at home and are fantastic for gradually strengthening muscles and bones. Start with light weights or bands, focusing on proper form and increase intensity as you get stronger. Remember you can incorporate household items like water bottles, tinned goods or even a backpack filled with books for resistance.

Incorporate into daily activities

Whilst you can set aside specific exercise time and establish a routine, it is important to be realistic about how you operate and what is achievable when you are time poor. For example, do calf raises while brushing your teeth, perform squats while watching TV, carry groceries instead of using a trolley or take the stairs whenever possible.

Here's how a beginner strength training session might look:

- ▶ Frequency: 2–3 times a week
- ▶ Intensity: Moderate weights (6-7/10 rate of perceived exertion, 10 being the highest)
- ▶ Volume: 2–3 sets of 8–12 repetitions
- ▶ Rest period: 60–90 seconds between sets or longer if needed
- ▶ Exercise selection: Start with compound exercises (e.g. squats, push-ups), then add isolation movements (e.g., bicep curls)

You can adjust these parameters over time as your strength and goals evolve.

Consult a health professional before starting a strength training programme if you have an underlying health condition.



Enhancing Your Financial Wellbeing

Financial worries can be a significant source of stress and anxiety, impacting not only your bank balance but also your mental and emotional health.

The cost of living in the UK is rising each year, with many Brits feeling the strain.

- ▶ One in three (31%) Brits say financial stress has had an impact on their mental health.
- ▶ Three in ten Brits (30%) have issues with sleep as a result of financial stress.
- ▶ Over 80% of millennials and generation Z have experienced financial stress in the past year, compared to 30% of the silent generation.
- ▶ One in five people (18%) with mental health problems are unable to afford their debt repayments.

If you are dealing with debt or simply anxious about the future, there are proactive steps you can take to cope with financial concerns and improve your overall financial wellbeing.

Financial stress often stems from feeling out of control. This can be due to unexpected expenses, a lack of savings or not having a clear plan for managing your finances. Recognising the sources of your financial worries is the first step towards addressing them.

A budget is a fundamental tool for financial management.



COPING WITH IMMEDIATE FINANCIAL STRESS

- ▶ **Assess your situation**
Take a thorough look at your finances. List all your income, expenses, debts and savings. This will help you understand the bigger picture and identify specific areas that need attention.
- ▶ **Create a budget**
A budget is a fundamental tool for financial management. It helps you track your spending, prioritise necessary expenses and find ways to cut back on non-essentials.
- ▶ **Emergency fund**
Work on building an emergency fund to cover unexpected costs. This can prevent the need for taking on high-interest debt in tough times and provide peace of mind.
- ▶ **Seek professional advice**
If you're overwhelmed, consider seeking help from a financial advisor or a debt counselling service. They can offer strategies for debt management and savings that you might not have considered.

IMPROVING LONG-TERM FINANCIAL WELLBEING

- ▶ **Set financial goals**
Having clear, achievable financial goals can provide motivation and direction. Whether it's saving for a house deposit, retirement or creating a fund for your children's education, goals can help you stay focused and make informed financial decisions.
- ▶ **Automate savings**
If you use online banking, you could set up automatic transfers to your savings account each time you receive your pay. This "pay yourself first" approach ensures you're consistently building your savings.
- ▶ **Mindful spending**
Adopt a mindful approach to spending. Before making a purchase, ask yourself if it's necessary and if it aligns with your financial goals.

SEEK ADVICE

Many people face financial challenges and there's no shame in seeking help. Talk to friends and family about what you're going through, join support groups or access resources.

If you feel you need expert help:

- ▶ You can speak to your EAP if you have one.
- ▶ [Citizens Advice](#) covers a wide range of topics including getting help with the cost of living, getting help with bills, how to manage debt and more.
- ▶ [StepChange](#) has a range of tools and guidance to help you get on top of your money worries.
- ▶ Call [Money Helper](#) on 0800 011 3797 or the [National Debtline](#) on 0808 808 4000.
- ▶ [Mind](#) offers money and mental health support, which includes advice on how to manage debt.

If your financial worries are having an impact on your mental health, please contact your GP for further advice and support.

Resources

- ▶ [Calculate your heart age | NHS](#)
- ▶ [Heart health questions, information and support | BHF](#)
- ▶ [How to improve your strength and flexibility | NHS](#)
- ▶ [The Benefits of Strength Training | Health Partners Group](#)
- ▶ [The Role of Exercise in Musculoskeletal Health | Health Partners Group](#)
- ▶ [Strength exercises you can do at home | BHF](#)
- ▶ [The importance of strength training for overall health | Harvard Health](#)
- ▶ [Physical activity guidelines | WHO](#)
- ▶ [Financial stress and mental health statistics UK | Finder UK](#)
- ▶ [Coping with financial worries | NHS](#)
- ▶ [StepChange](#)
- ▶ [Citizens Advice](#)
- ▶ [Money Helper](#)
- ▶ [1 in 3 Brits report mental health struggles due to financial issues | Pepper Money](#)



NEXT ISSUE:

- ▶ Hearing Loss & Protection
- ▶ Neurodiversity Celebration

At Health Partners we offer a full range of tailored health and wellbeing services.

Our thinking is innovative. We constantly develop new responses and tools designed to address the health and wellbeing challenges that face your business and people.

Our commitment is total. We invest in our services, creating new ones and keeping in step with every client. We constantly explore new ways of working and make no compromises in the quality of our services.

Simply put, we are here to help people be their best.