

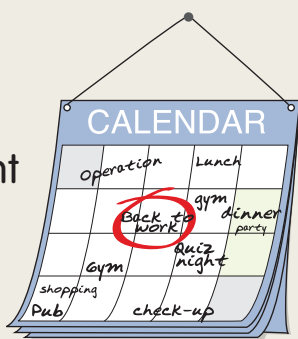
Is your heart ageing well?

Many of us think we know the perils of not looking after our hearts, but what does this mean as we age? Is it really possible to prevent yourself from going on to develop cardiovascular disease or should we just live life to the full? In this article we look at cardiovascular health throughout our lives



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This is not an actual quote but accurately reflects the views of our patients.

TWENTIES

Many people pay minimal attention to looking after their heart when they're in their 20s and, although we often know what we should be doing, time and pressures of family life sometimes get in the way.

Dr Nav Masani, a consultant cardiologist and UK specialist in echocardiography and adult congenital heart disease, said: “Important heart diseases affecting young adults (as well as children) include abnormalities of development of the heart,



known as congenital heart disease, and genetic conditions that may affect the heart rhythm or heart function.

“The most common congenital heart conditions affecting young adults are problems with heart valves and so-called holes in the heart, which are defects in the internal chamber walls. These conditions may cause symptoms of breathlessness, particularly during exertion, or may be detected as heart murmurs.

“Abnormalities of heart pumping function also present with breathlessness, while heart rhythm conditions cause palpitations.

“While these conditions are rare, it is important to be aware of them and to seek specialist advice if you experience any symptoms.”

THIRTIES AND FORTIES

In their 30s and 40s people often experience growing pressure on their household income and gym membership and eating healthily may be the last thing on their minds.

Professor Julian Halcox, from Spire Cardiff Hospital and the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, is a specialist in long-term cardiovascular risk management.

He said: “Lifestyle risk factors including unhealthy diets, lack of regular exercise and smoking have a damaging effect on the



health of the heart even from a young age, especially in those individuals who might be predisposed to heart problems on the basis of their genes and family history.

“Taking the time to undergo a simple and painless assessment can identify whether or not you are at increased risk of developing heart problems. This can help guide lifestyle changes and, where necessary, medication, which can dramatically reduce your long-term risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

“This assessment includes a detailed discussion, a clinical examination and a simple testing of a range of factors including blood pressure, cholesterol and sugar levels and, where appropriate, assessment of the health of the arteries themselves using the latest scanning technology.”

FIFTIES

People are most likely to feel the real impact of cardiac disease in their 50s.

Dr Nick Gerning, a cardiologist at Spire Cardiff Hospital, is one of the leading experts in erectile dysfunction and its relationship with cardiovascular disease.

“The risk factors for heart disease which are important in your 30s and 40s are just as important in your 50s,” he said. “But this is where it all really starts to kick in.

“As with the previous decades, it is important to have tight blood pressure control and that diabetes is



identified and treated adequately.

“Cholesterol levels should be identified and treated in this context, and it is important that weight is kept in check along with diet and exercise. It is critical to not smoke.”

Dr Gerning added: “One of the risk factors for men, which is very much understated, is erectile dysfunction (ED). This is emerging as a very powerful marker for future heart disease.

“Many patients are very embarrassed to raise this with their GP or other medical practitioner but it is very important to discuss it with them.

“If you do have ED, your risk of future cardiac disease and cardiac events could be higher – it is important this is identified so a professional can intervene expeditiously. It may improve your sex life and save your life.”

SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

People in their 60s and 70s are no longer considered old – exercise and looking after yourself is no less important than it was in previous decades.

Dr Zaheer Yousef, who specialises in heart failure and cardiomyopathy, said: “About 5% to 10% of this age group will suffer from heart failure.

“Heart failure in this age group can be very debilitating, causing a reduced exercise tolerance, breathlessness, fluid retention and tiredness.

“There are things that people can do to avoid heart



failure. If we've followed advice relating to smoking, exercise and diet and ensured blood pressure is controlled in younger years, then we will hopefully have avoided having a heart attack – about 70% of heart failure patients have suffered a previous heart attack.

“If you have a family history of heart muscle disease (cardiomyopathy) or sudden death then you should seek a specialist cardiologist opinion early, even if you're in your 20s or 30s.

“Heart murmurs can be a relatively common occurrence and most are innocent. However, it is important they are evaluated by a specialist to help prevent future problems.”

According to the British Heart Foundation's figures, cardiac disease remains the biggest cause of death in Wales, accounting for more than 11,000 a year.



Spire Healthcare

No matter what your age or medical conditions there are some measures you can take to ensure you maximise your cardiac health which may prevent you from developing cardiac disease in the future. To find out more visit the Spire Cardiff Hospital's South Wales Heart Centre website at www.spirehealthcare.com/cardiff/SouthWalesHeartCentre