

## Information about Heart Disease

[Dr Simon Williams](#), Consultant Cardiologist at The Spire Regency Hospital explains :

**The heart pumps blood around the body carrying oxygen and other nutrients to other areas that need it. When this process is interrupted, or does not work properly, serious illness and even death can result.**

There are several common heart conditions :

**1. Coronary Heart Disease** (sometimes referred to as Ischaemic Heart Disease). This is due to hardening or furred arteries (atherosclerosis). Atherosclerosis can lead to symptoms of angina (chest pains or breathlessness) or even cause a heart attack (myocardial infarction). Warning signs of a heart attack may include severe chest tightness/pain lasting more than a few minutes associated with feeling weak and sweaty, breathless or sickness.

**Several things increase your risk of coronary heart disease :-**

- male gender
- family history (especially first degree relatives under the age of 70)
- poor diet and high cholesterol levels in blood
- smoking
- lack of exercise
- being overweight
- having pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure

**2. Heart Failure** (sometimes referred to as cardiomyopathy). This has many causes, the most common being long standing coronary heart disease/previous heart attack (see above) or a viral cause (myocarditis). Heart failure causes symptoms of breathlessness and fluid retention e.g. swollen ankles and tiredness.

**3. Disturbed heart rhythm** (or arrhythmias). Patients may get fast heart rhythms and feel palpitations in their chest or slow rhythms and feel dizzy or lightheaded (and may even black out).

Several tests can be performed to investigate symptoms of heart disease. These include simple non-invasive tests such as a heart tracing (ECG), exercise testing, ultrasound scanning of the heart (echocardiography), heart rhythm and blood pressure monitoring. Other more complex tests include angiography (dye x ray of arteries in the heart).

A wide range of treatments exist to alleviate symptoms or save lives. These include lifestyle changes and medical advice, simple drug treatment and heart surgery (ranging from keyhole surgery e.g. angioplasty/stents or pacemakers to open heart surgery e.g. bypass or heart valve operations).