



National Heart Month 2021: What are you doing for February?

Each year, the British Heart Foundation (BHF) declares February as National Heart Month in the UK. During this time, awareness of a variety of heart conditions are brought to the fore with National Heart Month.

Many of us have heard of diseases relating to the heart and circulation and refer to these as cardiovascular diseases (CVD) or heart disease. However, there are many different types of heart conditions and problems.

Some examples of CVD and heart disease include:

- Angina
- Heart attack
- Heart failure
- Abnormal heart rhythms (Arrhythmia)
- Coronary heart disease
- Atrial fibrillation
- Congenital heart disease

CVD is both the UK's and the world's number one killer, according to the World Health Organization. An estimated 17.9 million people died from CVDs in 2016, representing 31% of all global deaths. Whilst the most recent figures from the BHF show that every day, 460 people in the UK die from CVD. The BHF also reports that there are 7.4 million people in the UK living with CVD, someone you know – or maybe even yourself – has been touched by CVD.

Understanding heart conditions is an incredibly difficult task – there are lots of different types and understanding how the heart works is more helpful when trying to learn about these conditions. But looking at the facts will benefit yourself, your employees and the people you love in the long run.

What are the CVD risk factors?

There are several aspects that may increase your risk of developing CVD, but the good news is that many heart and circulatory diseases are caused by risk factors that we can control, treat, and modify.

The three easiest areas for you to make a change are:

- **Smoking:** Smokers are almost twice as likely to have a heart attack compared to people who have never smoked.
- **Obesity:** Being overweight can have a big impact on your health, especially if you carry weight around your middle.
- **Physical inactivity:** The heart is a muscle, and like any other muscle it needs physical activity to help it work properly.

Other areas, that may take a little more time to understand include:

- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Ethnicity
- Family history
- Air pollution
- Stress
- Mental health

To gain a better understanding of some of these risk factors, please visit our [Take5 resource](#) page for free, downloadable information.

Each February, we actively promote National Heart Month at Healthy Performance by encouraging employers to raise awareness of the dangers of heart disease to their employees. 2021 is no different. In fact, while we are still amid the pandemic, ensuring that you are looking after yourself is essential.

On a wider scale, we assess the heart all year-round as part of our employee health checks. When the world returns to normal, during our health assessments we offer onsite checks which cover blood pressure and total cholesterol checks.

Why do these tests matter?

Firstly, blood pressure is the force that your blood pushes on the walls of the arteries. If you have high blood pressure then essentially there is a strain on the arteries and the heart. This can increase the risk of heart disease but also, strokes and kidney disease.

Around 30% of adults in England have high blood pressure but most don't know they have the condition. It often presents no symptoms, but it's important because it raises the risk of serious health problems such as heart disease and stroke. A blood pressure test is quick and painless and provides people with an instant result.

Secondly, it is essential that a person has enough cholesterol in their bodies in order to work effectively. However, too much cholesterol can cause our arteries to become blocked, which increases our risk of heart disease and stroke.

The risk of coronary heart disease (when the heart's blood supply is blocked or disrupted) rises as your blood's cholesterol level increases and this can cause angina during physical activity.

Similarly to blood pressure, having a high cholesterol level itself doesn't cause any symptoms which means that a person could have high cholesterol and not know about it. The only way to know your cholesterol level is to have it tested.