

Millbank Medical Centre

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NHS Health Check – Patient Information Leaflet

The NHS Health Check is a sophisticated check of your heart health. Aimed at adults in England aged 40 to 74, it checks your vascular or circulatory health and works out your risk of developing some of the most disabling – but preventable – illnesses.

Think of your NHS Health Check as being your "midlife MOT". It checks that some of your body's most important systems are all running smoothly. Among other things, your blood pressure, cholesterol, and BMI will all be checked and your results given to you.

Crucially, your NHS Health Check can detect potential problems before they do real damage. Everyone is at risk of developing heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and some forms of dementia. The good news is that these conditions can often be prevented.

Your NHS Health Check will assess your risk of developing these health problems and give you personalised advice on how to reduce it.

It's free of charge, including any follow-up tests or appointments.

At your NHS Health Check you will..

- be asked questions and have health tests that will give a picture of your health
- discuss the results, including personalised advice and lifestyle support. If necessary, you'll be offered treatment to help you maintain or improve your health and lower your risk of vascular conditions. Some people may be asked to return at a later date for their results
- if you're aged between 65 and 74, you will also be told the signs and symptoms of dementia, and you'll be made aware of memory services nearby

All the tests are simple to carry out, and there will be time to discuss the results with your GP or health professional afterwards.

Your medical history and that of your close relations, plus the choices you make about the way you live your life both play a role in deciding what your level of vascular risk is.

That's why your NHS Health Check will involve a brief personal history and a review of some key personal details. This will involve questions about your:

- age: older people are at an increased risk
- ethnicity: some ethnic groups, for example, people from south Asian and African-Caribbean backgrounds, are at an increased risk
- smoking status: smokers are at increased risk
- family history: if there's a history of these diseases in your family, then you're at an increased risk

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- physical activity: people who get little or no exercise are at an increased risk

You will also complete a questionnaire about the amount of alcohol you drink, as drinking above recommended limits increases your risk of both vascular and liver disease. There are 10 questions and it only takes around three minutes to do.

The health tests

As part of the NHS Health Check, your healthcare professional will need to do at least three simple and routine health tests. These tests are nothing to worry about, but are crucial for properly understanding your "heart age".

The cholesterol test

Cholesterol is a type of fat that is carried around our bodies in the blood.

It's vital that we have enough cholesterol for our bodies to work properly, but evidence strongly indicates that too much cholesterol and too much bad cholesterol can increase the risk of vascular diseases.

Cholesterol can build up in the walls of the blood vessels and stop or slow the flow of blood to your heart, brain and the rest of your body.

At an NHS Health Check, your cholesterol will be tested to see whether it is too high. Your health professional will take a sample of blood from you by using a needle and syringe, or by pricking your finger. You won't need to fast in advance of this blood test.

Afterwards, your healthcare professional may discuss your cholesterol result. If necessary, you'll be offered advice and support to help you achieve a healthy level of cholesterol.

The blood pressure test

Blood pressure is the force that your blood exerts on the walls of your arteries. When your blood pressure is too high, your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. Over time, this can weaken your heart. High blood pressure also places a strain on the walls of your arteries, making a blockage more likely.

This means that having high blood pressure is a big problem, because it increases the risk of serious health problems such as heart disease, stroke and kidney disease.

High blood pressure is common. Around 30% of adults in England have it but many don't know they do as it often presents no symptoms.

During an NHS Health Check, your blood pressure will be tested. Your GP, practice nurse or other health professional will use a cuff that fits around your upper arm and is inflated so that it becomes tight.

The test is quick and painless, and most people will have experienced it before.

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If your blood pressure is found to be high, you will be offered a blood test to check the function of your kidneys. You may also be offered a test to check your risk of developing diabetes.

Body mass index (BMI)

BMI is a measure of whether you're a healthy weight for your height. You can find out your BMI now by entering your details in a BMI healthy weight calculator.

Your BMI matters because people with an high BMI are at greater risk of a range of serious health conditions, including heart disease, stroke and certain cancers.

At your NHS Health Check, you will be measured and weighed by a healthcare professional. These measurements will be used to calculate your BMI. Your waist circumference may also be measured using a tape measure.

Diabetes risk assessment

Diabetes occurs when the body doesn't produce enough insulin, or the insulin doesn't work properly. Insulin is a hormone that allows cells to take in sugar to be used for energy. It can cause a wide range of health problems and can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Your health professional will take your personal history and blood pressure and BMI test results into account to assess whether you're at an increased risk of developing diabetes.

If you are found to be at risk of type 2 diabetes, you will be offered further tests to check the level of sugar in your blood (either a "finger-prick" test or a blood sample). If your blood sugar is high, you will then need to go on for further testing to establish if you have diabetes.

Getting your NHS Health Check results

The second part of an NHS Health Check is a discussion of your results with a trained healthcare professional. This will often hand you may be asked to have further tests.

Your results will be given to you as an overall risk score, telling you how likely you are to get heart disease or stroke in future. The results from each test will also be broken down so that you know which areas you need to take action to improve. You can find out more about this in Understanding your NHS Health Check results.

Your healthcare professional will give you personalised advice and lifestyle support to help you lower your risk and maintain or improve your vascular health. The best action for you will depend on your results. You may receive advice on how to get more physical activity into your daily routine, or how to eat a healthier diet.

If you're at high risk, you may be offered relevant treatments. Statins, for example, are a medication that help to control cholesterol levels. There are other medications that help to lower blood pressure when it's raised.