

Heart Attack – A Guide To Your Recovery

Male 1

Heart attacks don't happen to people like me. Couldn't happen to me. Could never happen to me.

Female

Well I'm back to normal. I'm a pretty good example, completely back to normal.

Male 2

Beyond the first few weeks, I never really felt like an invalid. And I don't feel like an invalid, and I think that's important.

Male 3

It'll last forever if I keep going at it the right way.

Male 4

This could be one for me as well, so it's go to the hospital and it turned out it was a heart attack.

Narrator

A heart attack. You can feel very alone when you have one. But in fact there are many others like you. Fifty-five people have heart attacks in Scotland every day that's almost 400 a week. So recovering from a heart attack has become a major event in the lives of thousands and thousands of people. Rates of coronary heart disease in Scotland are very high, among the highest in Europe. But because so many people have had heart disease here, there is a wide range of experience to learn from, and some very interesting lessons which apply throughout the country. And the first, and the most important lesson is that a heart attack is not an end, it's a beginning. If you come through the first 24 hours, there's a very good likelihood of returning to normal life. With proper care and a healthier lifestyle, you can help repair the damage your heart has suffered and reduce the risk of another attack.

Male 1

When I had the heart attack, I was in my office and I was walking around completely convinced that I was suffering from indigestion or anything else you want to imagine other than a heart attack.

Male 3

But I suppose basically it was a feeling of heartburn or indigestion or something like that.

Female

People in the town were absolutely shattered when I'd had an MI. They just couldn't believe it.

Male 4

The pains that I was suffering before I went into the hospital I knew they weren't pains that I'd suffered before.

Narrator

A heart attack is just the end result of heart disease. The basic problem is in your arteries. The heart is a muscle. Like all muscles, it needs oxygen and nutrients from the blood to function so the heart has its own blood vessels, the coronary arteries, to supply it. But like all arteries, these can become clogged up with fatty deposits which narrow them restricting the blood flow. When a coronary artery actually becomes blocked, an area of the heart muscle gets no more blood so, no more oxygen, and is damaged. Part of it can die. The heart may lose some of its pumping power or start to beat irregularly. As the heart begins to heal after an attack, however, scar tissue forms in the damaged area. In some cases, the scar itself is strong enough to allow the heart to pump almost as efficiently as normal. So, although the attack may feel as if it came, well, just out of the blue, it's actually the result of a process that's been going on for years. The clogging that restricts the blood flow through the arteries. Fortunately, that's a process you can stop.

Male 1

I now know the factors that go towards causing heart attacks and I wish I had been better educated on that subject before I'd had the heart attack, and I wouldn't have been smoking my diet would have been better, and I would be coping with stress in a different fashion.

Male 2

Primary coronary care, it's a bit like being in a cocoon. I mean, everybody's running after you, you just have to sort of look for the way people take care of you.

Narrator

For many people the worst part of a heart attack is the surprise. You go straight from being a person to being a patient, and you wonder will I ever be myself again?

What's going to happen to my life? How will I cope? Now it's only human nature to feel confused and worried, even feel guilty, but there is good news here as well. And the best is, having survived the attack; you're already on the way to recovery. A coronary care unit may seem a very technical place, but you see, that's because what has gone wrong is a technical thing, a mechanical function of the heart muscle. Here, every beat is monitored and analysed as the healing process begins. Admittedly, there's not much for you to do here. It can be lonely and frustrating being in hospital, but this is a good time to think. To think about the things in your life that might have brought you here, and how you can change them. There are three things that affect your risk which you cannot change-- it's your age, whether you're a man or a woman and your family history. But there are other risk factors which you can control from now on, in what you eat, whether you smoke, how active you are, and how you manage stress. If you address these factors then it's less likely you'll have to come back here.

Male 2

Possibly I'd a bad diet when I was younger, a diet heavy in fats. That'd be the most likely thing. It's a bit difficult to identify something exactly like that, but I would say a diet heavy in fats.

Male 4

It's a case of examining everything to the extent now that my children are looking at the labels, saying fat content -- that's too much and that's ok, and it is quite informative now that you know what not to get.

Female

Changing our eating habits wasn't difficult for me at all. I enjoy what I'm eating now much better than what I ate before. I didn't think I would, but I certainly do.

Male 1

Before I had a heart attack, my eating habits would be what I would consider to be normal. I would have the Sunday breakfast with the potato scones, the sausage, the egg. Nowadays after the heart attack, my diet is a good bit different. I didn't have a particularly bad diet before, but it's certainly different nowadays. It's much healthier.

Narrator

As we've seen, the clogging of the arteries

which leads to heart attacks doesn't just happen. It takes time and it's very much under our own control. Our lifestyle, including what we choose to eat, can have a big influence on the state of our arteries. And the two countries in Europe which could rival Scotland for heart disease are Northern Ireland and Finland, and what we have in common with them

is a diet that is high in animal fat and low in fruit and vegetables. People in less developed societies experience less heart disease but the fact is, our bodies are tuned to expect a different diet -- lots of fibre, lots of fruit, lots of vegetables. Our consumption of fats and sugars is way beyond our needs. In fact, the way some of us eat these days, it's a bit like running a lawnmower on jet fuel! So, how do we change that? Well, there are five ways that you can reduce your risk of heart disease by a change in diet. First of all, try to get most of your calories, that's your total energy, from starchy foods like potatoes and bread, rice and pasta. Second, cut down on your total fat intake. Use vegetable oils, eat more oily fish like mackerel or herring. Third, cut down on sugar. Just keep an eye on how much of this you put in your tea or your coffee and remember, that a lot of the sugar that we eat is hidden in prepared food and drink so it's well worthwhile looking at the label just to see what is in there. Fourth, fibre. Lots of fruit, lots of vegetables. Wholemeal bread. Do you know that fibre actually sticks to cholesterol in the bowel, which helps reduce the level of it in your blood? Fifth, and finally, watch the salt. Avoid adding it at the table, and again, look out for the amount of salt that's in prepared foods -- there's often quite a bit more than you think. Now you don't have to punish yourself. These days choosing healthier food can be much easier. Information labels can be a great help. Whole wheat bread or multigrain instead of white, cottage cheese or low fat cheddar, yoghurt instead of cream, low fat spread instead of butter. Less red meat, more fish, pasta, pulses, fruit and vegetables. Now remember, a healthy diet is real value for money.