

## ♥ Menopause Week | Cardiovascular disease ♥

In 1984, the World Health Organisation and the International Menopause Society introduced **International Menopause Day on the 18<sup>th</sup> October**, with a view to raising awareness about the menopause and related health conditions of this natural biological process that all women undergo during their lifetime.

This year, **cardiovascular disease** is being spotlighted, as there is a clear link with menopause and heart disease. So, why and how does this happen?

### The link between heart disease and the menopause

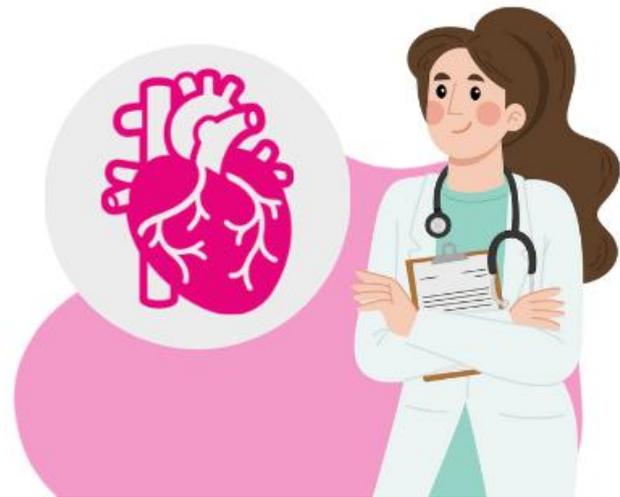
During and after the menopause, levels of oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone begin to decline. Periods end because the ovaries stop producing eggs and cause the hormone levels in your body to change.

**Oestrogen has a protective effect on your heart.** It helps to control your cholesterol levels and reduces the risk of fat build-up in your arteries. It also helps keep your blood vessels healthy.

When oestrogen levels fall, fat can build up in arteries causing them to become narrower. This increases risk of developing coronary heart disease, a heart attack or stroke.

the menopause can also cause bodily changes that increase the risk of coronary heart disease:

- **Weight gain** – many people report putting on weight during and after the menopause, especially around their waist.
- **High cholesterol** – after the menopause your cholesterol levels can go up, increasing risk of heart attack and stroke.
- **Your body cannot control sugar levels (glucose) as well** – this can increase the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and weight gain (metabolic syndrome).
- **Your blood pressure may go up** – blood vessels may not respond as well to change, meaning blood pressure could go up.
- **Increased amount of fat around the heart** – this could increase after the menopause.



## Protecting your heart

There are many things you can do to reduce the risk of developing heart disease such as:

- Healthy diet
- Exercise
- Reduce smoking and drinking alcohol
- HRT Therapy

**Not sure which exercise is right for you?** Why not try out the British Heart Foundation's short quiz:

[Quiz: Which sport, physical activity or fitness class should you try? – BHF](#)

## Hormone replacement therapy

There's also evidence that **HRT can reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease, or of having a heart attack and stroke**. This is because it replaces hormones in your body, which can help to protect your heart.

**Evidence shows that HRT should be started within 10 years of starting the menopause and before the age of 60.** The earlier HRT is started, the more effective it is at protecting your heart and reducing your risk of coronary heart disease. You can read about one person's experience of using HRT to reduce her risk of developing heart disease here: [Taking HRT to protect the heart – Heart Matters magazine – BHF](#)

## Why it is important to get Cholesterol tested?

- High cholesterol is when you have too much of a fatty substance called cholesterol in your blood.
- It's mainly caused by eating fatty food, not exercising enough, being overweight, smoking and drinking alcohol. It can also run in families.
- You can lower your cholesterol by eating healthily and getting more exercise. Some people also need to take medicine.
- Too much cholesterol can block your blood vessels. It makes you more likely to have heart problems or a stroke.
- High cholesterol does not cause symptoms. You can only find out if you have it from a blood test.

**You can request a cholesterol test from your local GP.**

For more information on Menopause and Cardiovascular Disease, you can visit:

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