

Safe Haven Connect CIC · Registered CIC

Living Well with Heart Disease – A Practical Workbook

Version 1.0

Welcome

Being told you have heart disease can bring many emotions. You may feel frightened, overwhelmed, angry, or unsure about what the future holds. These feelings are completely understandable.

The good news is that many people with heart disease go on to live long, active and fulfilling lives. With the right medical care, healthy lifestyle changes and emotional support, you can reduce your risk of further problems and improve your quality of life.

This workbook has been created to help you understand heart disease, manage your wellbeing, and build confidence one step at a time.

Whether you have recently been diagnosed, are recovering from a heart attack or procedure, or have been living with heart disease for many years, this workbook is here to support you.

Remember:

Progress is more important than perfection. Small changes made consistently can make a big difference.

Module 1 – Understanding Heart Disease

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is a general term used to describe conditions that affect the heart and blood vessels. These conditions can reduce the heart's ability to pump blood efficiently around the body.

Common types include:

Coronary heart disease (narrowing of the arteries)

Heart attack (myocardial infarction)

Heart failure

Heart valve disease

Irregular heart rhythms (arrhythmias)

Congenital heart disease (present from birth)

Although these conditions are different, many share similar risk factors and can often be managed successfully.

Common Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on the condition but may include:

Chest pain or discomfort

Shortness of breath

Extreme tiredness

Dizziness

Heart palpitations

Swollen ankles or feet

Feeling faint

Pain spreading into the arm, jaw, neck or back

If you experience severe chest pain or symptoms that could indicate a heart attack, call 999 immediately.

Risk Factors

Some risk factors cannot be changed:

Age

Family history

Some medical conditions

Others can often be improved:

Smoking

High blood pressure

High cholesterol

Diabetes

Being inactive

Obesity

Unhealthy diet

Excess alcohol

Long-term stress

Reflection Exercise

Think about your own health.

✓ Which risk factors apply to you?

☐ Smoking

☐ High blood pressure

☐ Diabetes

☐ High cholesterol

☐ Stress

☐ Poor sleep

☐ Lack of exercise

☐ Unhealthy diet

☐ Family history

Write down one area you would like to improve first.

Next: Module 2 – Looking After Your Heart, including heart-healthy eating, exercise, medication, and practical lifestyle changes.

Module 2 – Looking After Your Heart

Living with heart disease doesn't mean you have to give up doing the things you enjoy. Small, consistent lifestyle changes can make a significant difference to your heart health and overall wellbeing.

Remember, you don't have to change everything overnight. Every positive step counts.

Heart-Healthy Eating

A balanced diet helps your heart work more efficiently and can lower your risk of future heart problems.

Aim to eat more:

Fresh fruit and vegetables

Wholegrain bread, rice and pasta

Oats and high-fibre cereals

Beans, lentils and pulses

Fish (especially oily fish such as salmon, mackerel or sardines)

Unsalted nuts and seeds

Low-fat dairy products

Lean meats such as chicken or turkey

Try to reduce:

Salt

Sugary drinks

Cakes and sweets

Fried foods

Processed meats

Takeaways

Foods high in saturated fat

Excess alcohol

Remember, healthy eating is about balance—not perfection.

Keeping Active

Regular physical activity helps strengthen your heart, improve circulation and boost your mood.

Always follow the advice given by your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team.

Activities may include:

Walking

Gentle cycling

Swimming (if advised)

Gardening

Chair exercises

Light stretching

Start slowly.

Even 10 minutes of gentle activity can make a difference.

Taking Your Medication

Your medication helps protect your heart.

To get the most benefit:

Take medication exactly as prescribed.

Don't stop taking medication without speaking to your healthcare professional.

Use a pill organiser if it helps.

Set reminders on your phone.

Keep an up-to-date list of your medicines.

If you experience side effects, seek medical advice rather than stopping medication yourself.

Looking After Your Blood Pressure

High blood pressure often has no symptoms but increases the workload on your heart.

You can help manage it by:

Eating less salt

Staying active

Maintaining a healthy weight

Taking prescribed medication

Managing stress

Limiting alcohol

Not smoking

Stopping Smoking

Stopping smoking is one of the best things you can do for your heart.

Benefits begin quickly:

Within days, your circulation starts to improve.

Within weeks, breathing becomes easier.

Over time, your risk of another heart event falls significantly.

If you're finding it difficult to stop, ask your GP or local stop smoking service for support.

My Healthy Heart Goals

Choose one or two small goals to work on this week.

- ☐ Walk for _____ minutes each day.
- ☐ Eat _____ portions of fruit or vegetables daily.
- ☐ Drink more water.
- ☐ Reduce sugary snacks.
- ☐ Take my medication every day.
- ☐ Reduce my salt intake.
- ☐ Attend my appointments.
- ☐ Other:

Reflection

What healthy change feels most achievable for you right now?

Remember: lasting change comes from small steps repeated consistently.

Next: Module 3 – Managing Your Mental Wellbeing, exploring anxiety after diagnosis, stress, low mood, coping with uncertainty, and building emotional resilience.

Module 3 – Managing Your Mental Wellbeing

A diagnosis of heart disease can affect much more than your physical health. It can also have a significant impact on your emotions, confidence and relationships.

Many people experience anxiety, sadness, frustration or fear after being diagnosed or following a heart attack or heart procedure. These feelings are common and you are not alone.

Looking after your mental wellbeing is an important part of looking after your heart.

Common Emotional Reactions

After a diagnosis, you may experience:

Anxiety about your future.

Fear of another heart attack or becoming unwell.

Feeling low or depressed.

Frustration at changes to your lifestyle.

Anger or denial.

Worry about your family or finances.

Loss of confidence.

These emotions often improve with time, support and understanding.

Coping with Anxiety

Feeling anxious is a normal response to a major health event, but anxiety can sometimes become overwhelming.

You may notice:

Racing thoughts.

Difficulty sleeping.

Feeling constantly on edge.

Avoiding activities because you're worried.

Feeling your heart beating faster, which can increase anxiety further.

Helpful strategies

Take slow, controlled breaths.

Go for a gentle walk if your healthcare team has advised it is safe.

Speak to someone you trust.

Limit reading distressing stories online.

Focus on facts rather than worst-case scenarios.

Attend cardiac rehabilitation if offered.

Managing Stress

Long-term stress can affect both your physical and emotional wellbeing.

Ask yourself:

What situations cause me the most stress?

Which stresses can I change?

Which stresses do I need support with?

Healthy ways to manage stress include:

Listening to calming music.

Gentle exercise.

Spending time outdoors.

Reading.

Mindfulness or meditation.

Talking to friends or family.

Joining a support group.

Looking After Your Sleep

Good sleep helps both your body and your heart recover.

Try to:

Go to bed at the same time each night.

Reduce caffeine later in the day.

Limit screen time before bed.

Keep your bedroom cool, dark and quiet.

Practise relaxation before sleeping.

If poor sleep continues, speak to your GP or healthcare professional.

Building Emotional Resilience

Resilience doesn't mean pretending everything is okay.

It means learning ways to cope with life's challenges.

You can build resilience by:

Celebrating small achievements.

Accepting that recovery takes time.

Being kind to yourself.

Staying connected with others.

Asking for help when you need it.

Focusing on what you can control.

Reflection Exercise

Take a moment to think about how you've been feeling recently.

Today I feel:

☐ Calm

☐ Hopeful

☐ Anxious

☐ Low

☐ Frustrated

☐ Tired

☐ Motivated

☐ Other: _____

My Support Network

Write down people or organisations you can turn to for support.

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Healthcare Professional: _____

Other Support: _____

Positive Reminder

Write one encouraging sentence you can read whenever you're having a difficult day.

Remember: Recovery is rarely a straight line. Some days will feel easier than others, and that's okay. Every positive choice you make is a step towards improving your wellbeing.

Next: Module 4 – Daily Living with Heart Disease, including returning to work, travelling, driving, managing fatigue, relationships and creating a healthy routine.

Module 4 – Daily Living with Heart Disease

Living with heart disease often means making adjustments to your daily routine, but it doesn't mean life has to stop. Many people continue to work, travel, enjoy hobbies and spend time with loved ones. The key is learning to pace yourself, listen to your body and seek support when needed.

Managing Fatigue

Feeling tired is common, especially after a heart attack, surgery or when adjusting to new medication.

You may find that everyday tasks leave you feeling exhausted.

Tips for managing fatigue

Prioritise the most important tasks.

Break larger jobs into smaller steps.

Take regular breaks before you become overtired.

Accept help from family or friends when offered.

Aim for regular, good-quality sleep.

Stay active within the limits advised by your healthcare team.

Remember, rest is part of recovery—not a sign of failure.

Returning to Work

Many people are able to return to work after heart disease, although it may take time.

Before returning:

Speak with your GP or cardiac rehabilitation team.

Discuss any adjustments with your employer.

Consider a phased return if available.

Be honest about how you're feeling.

You may need temporary changes to your duties while you regain your strength.

Driving

Whether you can drive depends on your heart condition and treatment.

Always follow advice from your healthcare professional and any relevant licensing requirements.

Do not drive if you have been advised not to or if you experience symptoms such as:

Chest pain

Dizziness

Blackouts

Severe breathlessness

If you're unsure, ask your doctor before driving again.

Travelling

Having heart disease doesn't necessarily mean you can't travel.

Before travelling:

Take enough medication for your trip.

Carry a list of your medications.

Keep medication in your hand luggage when flying.

Stay hydrated.

Take regular breaks on long journeys.

Check your travel insurance covers your medical condition.

If travelling abroad, discuss your plans with your healthcare professional if you have any concerns.

Relationships and Intimacy

Heart disease can affect relationships, confidence and intimacy.

It's common to worry about:

Your physical ability.

Causing another heart problem.

Changes in body image.

Feeling less independent.

Talking openly with your partner and healthcare team can help reduce these worries.

Building a Healthy Daily Routine

Having a routine can improve both physical and emotional wellbeing.

A balanced day might include:

- ✓ Taking medication on time
- ✓ Eating regular healthy meals
- ✓ Gentle physical activity
- ✓ Time to relax
- ✓ Social contact
- ✓ Drinking enough water
- ✓ A regular bedtime

Small daily habits often lead to lasting improvements.

My Daily Wellbeing Plan

Morning

- ☐ Take medication
- ☐ Eat breakfast
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Gentle movement

Afternoon

- ☐ Healthy lunch
- ☐ Light activity
- ☐ Rest if needed
- ☐ Connect with someone

Evening

- ☐ Healthy evening meal
- ☐ Relaxation time
- ☐ Prepare medication for tomorrow
- ☐ Good bedtime routine

Reflection Exercise

What daily habit would make the biggest positive difference to your wellbeing?

My Goal for This Week

Choose one realistic goal.

- ☐ Walk a little more.
- ☐ Eat one extra portion of fruit or vegetables each day.
- ☐ Improve my sleep routine.
- ☐ Spend time with family or friends.
- ☐ Attend a medical appointment.
- ☐ Ask for help when I need it.
- ☐ Other:

Final Thought

Living with heart disease may change parts of your life, but it doesn't define who you are. Recovery is about taking one day at a time, celebrating progress and remembering that even small healthy choices can have a lasting impact.

Next: Practical Worksheets, including a medication tracker, blood pressure log, symptom diary, healthy eating planner, exercise planner, mood diary, questions for appointments, weekly wellbeing planner and personal action plan.

Practical Worksheets

These worksheets are designed to help you put what you've learned into practice. You don't have to complete them all at once—use them in the way that works best for you.

Worksheet 1 – My Medication Tracker

Keeping track of your medication can help you take it consistently and identify any questions for your healthcare team.

Medication	Dose	Time	Purpose	Tick When Taken
			☐	
			☐	
			☐	
			☐	

Questions about my medication:

Worksheet 2 – Blood Pressure Log

Date	Blood Pressure	Pulse	Notes
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Worksheet 3 – Symptom Diary

Record any symptoms you experience and discuss ongoing concerns with your healthcare professional.

Date	Symptom	What was I doing?	How long did it last?
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Worksheet 4 – My Healthy Eating Planner

Breakfast

Lunch

Evening Meal

Healthy Snacks

Water Goal

☐ 6–8 glasses

☐ Other: _____

Worksheet 5 – Exercise Planner

Always follow the advice of your healthcare professional.

Day	Activity Time	Completed
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Monday		☐
Tuesday		☐
Wednesday		☐
Thursday		☐
Friday	☐	
Saturday		☐
Sunday		☐

Worksheet 6 – Mood Check-In

How have you been feeling today?

😊 Very Good

🙂 Good

😐 Okay

😞 Low

😓 Very Low

What has helped today?

What has been difficult?

Worksheet 7 – Questions for My Healthcare Team

Write down any questions before your appointment.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Worksheet 8 – Weekly Wellbeing Planner

This Week I Will:

- ☐ Take my medication every day.
- ☐ Eat more fruit and vegetables.
- ☐ Stay active safely.
- ☐ Drink enough water.
- ☐ Get enough sleep.
- ☐ Spend time with family or friends.
- ☐ Practise relaxation.
- ☐ Attend my appointments.

☐ Ask for help if I need it.

Worksheet 9 – My Personal Action Plan

My biggest goal is:

Three small steps I will take:

1.

2.

3.

Who can support me?

How will I celebrate my progress?

Remember

Recovery is a journey, not a race. Some days will feel easier than others, and that's completely normal. Be patient with yourself, celebrate every small success, and don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

Next: UK Support & Resources, followed by your Congratulations, Disclaimer, Copyright, and About Safe Haven Connect CIC pages

UK Support & Resources

Living with heart disease can feel overwhelming at times, but you don't have to face it alone. There are many organisations and healthcare professionals who can provide information, practical advice and emotional support.

British Heart Foundation (BHF)

The British Heart Foundation offers trusted information on heart conditions, treatments, healthy living, fundraising and support.

They provide guidance on:

Understanding heart disease

Healthy lifestyle advice

Recovery after a heart attack

Cardiac rehabilitation

Research updates

NHS

The NHS provides reliable information on:

Heart disease

Heart attacks

Heart failure

High blood pressure

Cholesterol

Healthy eating

Exercise

Medicines

Speak to your GP if you have any concerns about your symptoms, medication or recovery.

Cardiac Rehabilitation

If you've experienced a heart attack, heart surgery or another significant heart condition, you may be offered cardiac rehabilitation.

These programmes can help you:

Build confidence

Improve fitness safely

Learn about heart health

Manage stress and anxiety

Reduce the risk of future heart problems

If you haven't been offered cardiac rehabilitation, ask your GP or hospital team if it's suitable for you.

Mental Health Support

Living with a long-term health condition can affect your emotional wellbeing.

If you're struggling with anxiety, stress or low mood:

Speak to your GP.

Self-refer to your local NHS Talking Therapies service (where available).

Reach out to trusted family or friends.

Join a local or online support group.

Seeking support is a sign of strength.

When to Seek Urgent Medical Help

Call 999 immediately if you experience symptoms that could indicate a heart attack, such as:

Sudden chest pain or pressure that doesn't go away

Pain spreading to your arms, jaw, neck, back or stomach

Severe shortness of breath

Feeling faint or collapsing

Cold sweats, nausea or vomiting alongside chest pain

If you're unsure whether your symptoms are serious, it's always safer to seek urgent medical advice.

Congratulations

Well done on completing this workbook.

Taking time to learn about your condition and develop healthy habits is an important step towards looking after both your heart and your overall wellbeing.

Remember:

Progress takes time.

Small changes add up.

It's okay to ask for help.

Every positive choice matters.

Be proud of the steps you've taken. Keep using the worksheets whenever you need them, and remember that recovery is a journey—not a race.

Disclaimer

This workbook has been created by Safe Haven Connect CIC for educational and self-help purposes only.

It is not intended to replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment from a qualified healthcare professional.

Always seek advice from your GP, cardiologist or another healthcare professional regarding any concerns about your heart condition, medications or treatment.

If you think you may be experiencing a medical emergency, including symptoms of a heart attack, call 999 immediately.

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About Safe Haven Connect CIC

Safe Haven Connect CIC is a UK community interest company dedicated to improving mental health and wellbeing through free resources, practical tools and peer support.

Our mission is to make wellbeing support accessible to everyone by providing high-quality workbooks, self-help guides and community resources.

Website: <https://safehavenconnect.org>

Free Workbook Library: <https://safehavenconnect.org/workbooks>

Remember: You are not alone. Support is available, and every step you take towards looking after your health matters. 