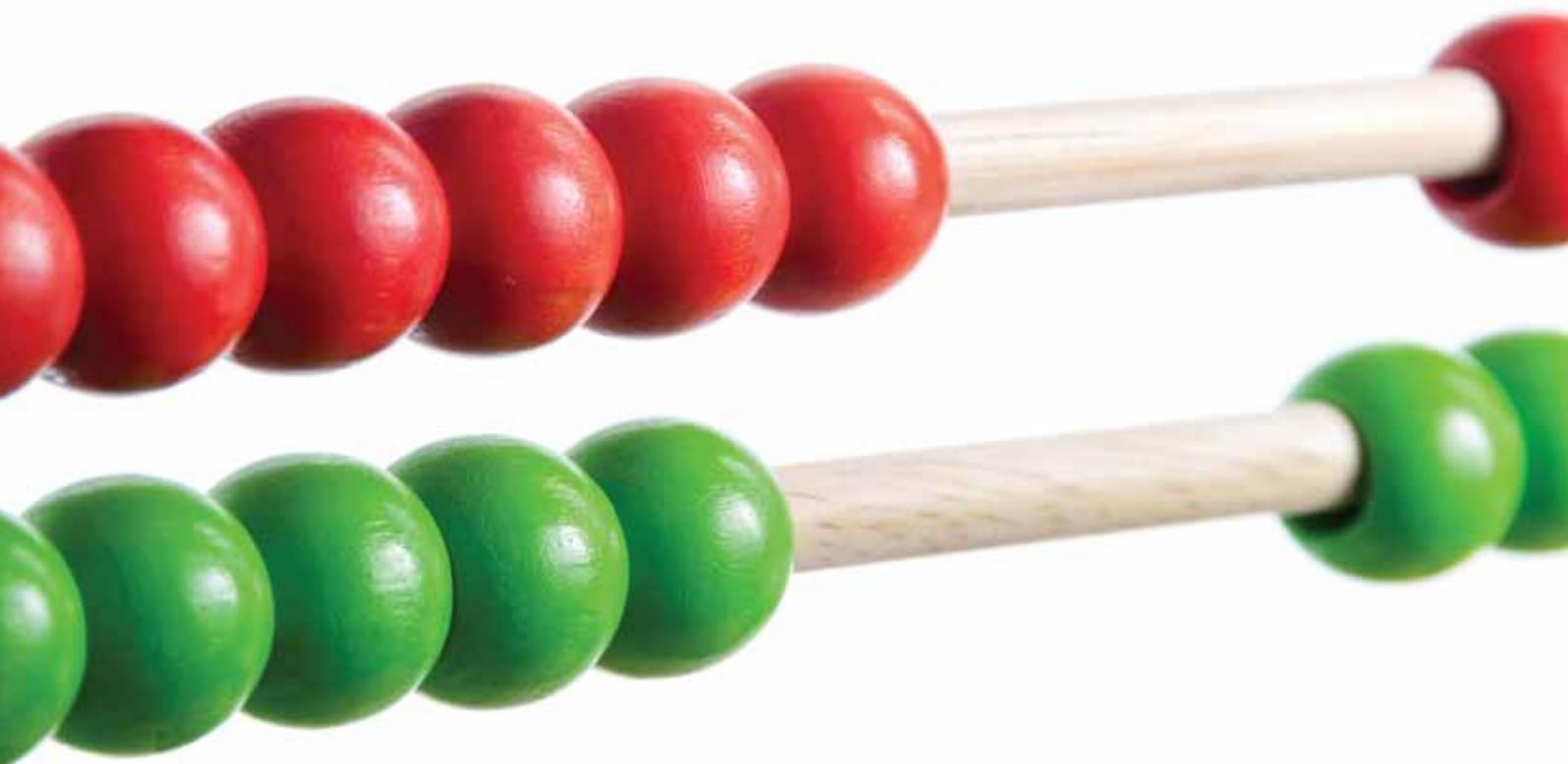


Manage your heart and stroke risk

A 3-step guide to **better health**



An initiative of the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance



strokefoundation

Most heart attacks and strokes are preventable.

Cardiovascular disease is Australia's biggest killer. By following three steps you can improve your health and reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.

1. See your doctor to find out your personal heart and stroke risk score.
2. Follow your doctor's advice and make changes to your lifestyle.
3. Have a health action plan and follow it.

Step 1.

See your doctor to **find out** your personal heart and stroke **risk score**.

In the past your doctor may have treated each of your risk factors one at a time without taking the others into account. Your risk score puts all the risk factors together. This is a bit like putting all the pieces of a puzzle together so you can see the whole picture. By looking at the whole picture your doctor can discuss ways that you can reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.

Some people who have particular medical conditions do not need a risk score because they are already at high risk. Your doctor will tell you if you are in this group and advise you what to do to reduce your risk.

Why do I need to manage my risk?

Every hour, five Australians die from heart, stroke and blood vessel disease*, a group of conditions together known as cardiovascular disease. Many others live with a disability after having a heart attack or stroke. It can be hard to know if you are at risk because often you can't feel any symptoms. The good news is that you can take three steps to improve your health and help reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Although a healthy lifestyle is important at any age, your heart and stroke risk naturally increases with age. If you are over 45 years of age, or over 35 if you are Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander, follow the three steps in this plan to decrease your risk.



How is my heart and stroke risk score measured?

Your doctor will record a range of your risk factors including:

- **Blood pressure**
- **Age**
- **Cholesterol**
- **Sex**
- **Whether you smoke**

Your doctor will also look at other important factors that can increase your risk such as:

- **Diabetes**
- **Chronic kidney disease**
- **An irregular heart beat also known as atrial fibrillation**
- **A family history of heart attack or stroke in a first degree relative (mother, father or sibling) under 55 years of age**
- **A family history of high cholesterol**
- **If you are overweight**

Your doctor will calculate your personal heart and stroke risk score by looking at your risk factors and turning them into a percentage score.

What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is something about your body or behaviour that increases your chance of disease. The more cardiovascular risk factors you have, the more likely you are to have a heart attack or stroke.

Can I have a risk score if I am already taking medication?

Yes, your doctor can give you a risk score even if you are already taking medication for high blood pressure or high cholesterol. Your doctor will use your most recent blood pressure or cholesterol test results taken before you started on medication. This will give an estimate of your risk. Where these results are not available, talk to your doctor about the best way to manage your risk.

You can control your risk factors.

You can control many of your risk factors, such as your blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking, the amount of alcohol you drink, your food choices, your weight and your level of exercise. Your doctor can advise you on a personal health action plan to control your risk factors and reduce your heart and stroke risk.

Did you know?

A score over 15% means you are at high risk.

HIGH RISK

If you have a score of over 15% you have at least a 1 in 7 chance of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years if left unmanaged.

MODERATE RISK

If you have a score of between 10-15% you have at least a 1 in 10 chance of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years if left unmanaged.

LOW RISK

If you have a score of under 10% you have a less than 1 in 10 chance of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years if left unmanaged.

HIGH RISK
over 15%

MODERATE RISK
10-15%

LOW RISK
under 10%

Step 2.

Follow your doctor's advice and **make changes** to your lifestyle.

No matter what your risk level you can make improvements to your health. Talk to your doctor about the changes you can make to improve your health and reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke. This includes making lifestyle changes and in some cases taking medication.

Which lifestyle changes will reduce my risk?

- Stop smoking and avoid second hand smoke.
- Be active every day. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise such as brisk walking on most, or preferably every day of the week.



- Avoid adding salt to food. Choose 'no added salt', 'low salt' or 'salt reduced' foods where possible.
- Eat a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, lean meats, oily fish, eggs and low fat dairy products. Remember to also eat nuts, seeds and legumes.
- Limit fried and baked foods especially chips, biscuits, cakes and other baked cereal products.
- Limit alcohol to less than two standard drinks per day.
- Limit foods and drinks containing added sugar, especially sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Drink water.

What if my doctor prescribes medication?

There are many safe and effective drugs available to help you reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke. Depending on your personal risk score, your doctor may prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure or cholesterol or both at the same time. This will happen as well as helping you to make some changes to your lifestyle. Sometimes it is necessary to adjust the medication or add a second or third medication to make sure your risk reduces. It is important that you visit your doctor regularly to check how you are responding to the medication.

Remember

- Do not stop your medications. Talk to your doctor or ask your pharmacist if you are having any problems.
- Take all your medications exactly as prescribed by your doctor.
- Visit your doctor regularly to check how the medication is working.
- Remember to follow a healthy lifestyle even if you are taking medications.

Did you know?

Making lifestyle changes can reduce your blood pressure and cholesterol levels in addition to other general benefits.

How long do I have to stay on medication?

Most people need to take their medication for the rest of their lives. However some people make lasting changes to their lifestyle. For example, quitting smoking and losing weight can lead to a significant reduction in your heart and stroke risk. You could then talk to your doctor about reducing the medication.



Did you know?

Your doctor can help with side effects of medication.

It is important to take all your medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor even if you feel well. Speak to your doctor if you have any questions or any problems or side effects with your medication. Do not stop your medication until you have talked to your doctor.

Step 3.

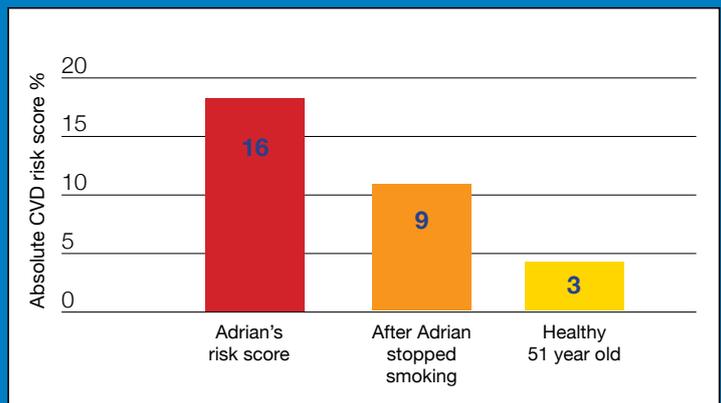
Have a health action plan and **follow it.**

Small changes to your lifestyle can make big improvements to your health. Together with your doctor, set goals you can achieve. Make a personal health action plan, and regularly keep track of your progress. Use the action planner on the back of this booklet to get started.



Changing your lifestyle can reduce your risk.

At the age of 51, Adrian, a smoker with high blood pressure and slightly high cholesterol discovered that his risk score was 16%. This means he was at high risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years. His doctor put him on medication to reduce his blood pressure and cholesterol and suggested some lifestyle changes. After some counselling and support, Adrian successfully stopped smoking and now, a year later, his risk score has reduced to 9% or low risk and he has been able to reduce his medication.



An initiative of the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance



This document has been produced by the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance (NVDPA) as a service to the Australian community. The NVDPA is a group of four leading Australian charities: Kidney Health Australia, Diabetes Australia, The National Heart Foundation of Australia and the National Stroke Foundation. It was established in 2000 to reduce cardiovascular disease in Australia.

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My health action plan to reduce my heart and stroke risk

Knowing your risk score will help you know what action to take to reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke. Keep a record of your risk score at different dates to see your progress and remember to take this sheet to all your appointments.

My risk score

As advised by your doctor.

Score

Date

Score

Date

Score

Date

Score

Date

My medication

(include how often your doctor will check your response to the medication)

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Other health professionals

(e.g. dietitian, personal trainer, smoking cessation program)

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My next appointment with my doctor

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How can I find out more?

If you want to find out more about cardiovascular disease, or how to have a healthier lifestyle, go to these organisations for helpful information.

Diabetes Australia

www.diabetesaustralia.com.au **1300 136 588**

Heart Foundation

www.heartfoundation.org.au **1300 36 27 87**

Kidney Health Australia

www.kidney.org.au **1800 454 363**

National Stroke Foundation

www.strokefoundation.com.au StrokeLine **1800 STROKE** (787 653)

Quit

www.quitbecauseyoucan.org.au or call **13QUIT**

My lifestyle goals

You and your doctor or other health professional can fill in the plan below with goals and actions that you can take to reduce your personal heart and stroke risk.

Exercise	<i>Date</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Action plan</i>	<i>Progress</i>

Diet	<i>Date</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Action plan</i>	<i>Progress</i>

Smoking	<i>Date</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Action plan</i>	<i>Progress</i>

Alcohol	<i>Date</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Action plan</i>	<i>Progress</i>