What is an NHS Health Check?

What happens at the health check, and how to get one

Everyone is at some risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and some forms of dementia. An NHS Health Check aims to help you lower your risk of developing these common but often preventable diseases. You will be invited for a NHS Health Check once every five years if you are between 40 and 74 years old and haven't already been diagnosed with vascular diseases or have certain risk factors such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol treated by medication. This invitation will be via letter sent by your GP practice asking you to make an appointment.

At the check, your risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and diabetes will be assessed through some straightforward tests and standard questions about your lifestyle and family medical history. You'll be offered personalised advice and support to help you lower that risk and stay healthy. This could include suggestions on small changes to your diet or how much exercise you take if your risk is low or moderate. If you are at higher risk, you might be offered things such as **medicines to control your blood pressure**, along with help to take action including **losing weight** or **stopping smoking**.

It makes sense for all eligible people to have a routine NHS Health Check for these conditions every five years. That means you can **take action** early, and greatly improve your chance of a healthier and longer life. Small, long-lasting changes to your lifestyle can make a huge difference.

What will happen at the NHS Health Check?

There are two parts to an NHS Health Check. First, you will be asked a few simple questions and have a few straightforward health tests. These will allow an assessment of your risk of developing four diseases: heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and kidney disease.

The check will take around 20 to 30 minutes:

You'll be asked some simple questions about your family history, whether or not you smoke and how much   alcohol you drink.
Your height, weight, sex, ethnicity and age will be recorded.
Your blood pressure will be taken.
A simple blood test will check your cholesterol level.
Your body mass index (BMI) will be calculated. BMI is a measure of whether you're a healthy weight for your   height.

After this, a healthcare professional (Practice nurse) will give you your results and explain what they mean. In some instances, tests may have to be sent

away for analysis. This means that some people won't get their test results immediately and may be asked to return at a later date for this discussion. You'll have the opportunity to ask for advice and support on maintaining good health, and on lifestyle changes that will help you to improve your health. If necessary, you'll be offered treatments that will help: for example, medicine to lower raised blood pressure.

Why is the NHS Health Check important?

An NHS Health Check will help to identify your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and certain types of dementia. Together, these vascular diseases are the biggest cause of preventable deaths in the UK. They affect more than 4 million people. Everyone is at some risk of developing these diseases. But by identifying that risk early and taking steps to reduce it, you can improve your chance of maintaining or improving your health as you get older.

How the NHS Health Check will help

Once the NHS Health Check has shown you your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and certain types of dementia, you'll find out what you can do to reduce your risk. That may mean lifestyle changes such as **eating a healthier diet**, **cutting down on alcohol**, or increasing the amount of **physical activity** that you do.
There are some risk factors for these diseases that can't be changed. For example, your risk increases with age. But there's a lot you can do to reduce your risk. You can:

  maintain a healthy weight
  be physically active
  eat a healthy and balanced diet
  stop smoking
  cut down on alcohol

If you're at higher risk, those changes may be combined with medical treatments, such as **medicines to lower raised blood pressure** or **cholesterol**. You may be offered NHS support to help you stop smoking or lose weight.

These changes can help you to improve your health and prevent a disease that may otherwise have developed. NHS Health Check is expected to prevent 1,600 heart attacks and strokes a year and save 650 lives.