Know your heart and stroke **risk**

An initiative of the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance

Diabetes AUSTRALIA

KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA®

Heart Foundation™

strokefoundation

Knowing **your** risk of getting heart, stroke and vascular disease is the first step that you can take to help to prevent it.

This booklet explains a new way that your doctor can measure your heart and stroke risk score. When your doctor tells you what your risk score is, you can record it on page 4 of this booklet to help you to remember it.

This booklet also gives you tips and outlines simple steps that you can take to reduce your risk factors and improve your health.

Contents

What is my 'risk'?	Page 3
How has measuring heart and stroke risk changed?	Page 3
How is my heart and stroke risk measured?	Page 4
What does my heart and stroke risk score mean?	Page 4
What happens next?	Page 5
How can I reduce my risk factors?	Page 5
What is CVD?	Page 6
An example of CVD risk measurement	Page 7

Every hour, five Australians die from heart, stroke and blood vessel disease* (together known as 'cardiovascular disease' or 'CVD'). CVD is also a major cause of disability.

The good news is, most CVD is preventable. You can take steps to help to reduce your risk of CVD.

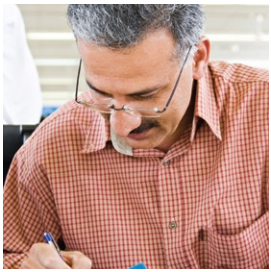
The first step is to **know your risk**.

Did you know?

CVD is Australia's biggest killer. It kills almost 22,000 men and more than 24,000 women each year (34% of all deaths).*

What is my 'risk'?

The first step is to find out your heart and stroke risk score, which is your chance, as an individual, of getting CVD. When you know your risk score, you can look at how you can reduce your risk by tackling your risk factors (things that can increase your chance of getting CVD).



It can be difficult to know whether or not you are at risk of CVD, because often you can't feel any symptoms. If you are 45 years old or over,** seeing your doctor is part of the first step.

How has measuring heart and stroke risk changed?

In the past, CVD risk was measured and treated by looking at one risk factor, such as blood pressure or cholesterol, at a time. We now know that your individual combination of risk factors is more important. Risk factors work together to increase or decrease your overall chance of getting CVD.

The new method of measuring your risk gives you an overall picture of your personal risk level, to help you and your doctor to identify the most important steps that you should take to reduce your risk and improve your health.

* Australian Bureau of Statistics. Causes of death 2006 (3303.0). March 2008.

** 35 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

How is my heart and stroke risk measured?

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

- blood pressure
- cholesterol
- whether or not you smoke.
- age
- sex

He or she will also look at other important factors that can increase your risk, such as whether or not you have:

- diabetes
- chronic kidney disease
- an irregular heart beat
- a family history of CVD or high cholesterol.

Your doctor will then use a 'risk calculator' to work out your overall heart and stroke risk score.

What does my heart and stroke risk score mean?

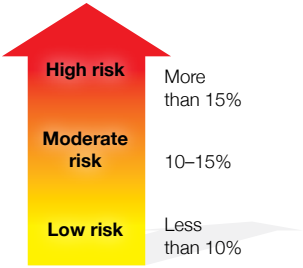
Your risk score shows your chance of getting CVD within five years.

What your heart and stroke risk score means

If your risk score was calculated to be more than 15%, you have a high risk of getting CVD in the next five years.

If all of the people with a risk score of more than 15% were grouped together, about 1 in 7 will get CVD within the next five years.

If your risk score is less than 10%, you have a low risk of getting CVD in the next five years.



Heart and stroke risk score: your risk of getting CVD within the next five years

Your doctor has calculated your heart and stroke risk score by looking at your risk factors and turning them into a percentage score.

Your heart and stroke risk score is

_____%.

What happens next?

Your doctor will look at your risk score and your individual risk factors to work out what steps you should take to reduce your risk.

If you are at **low risk**, ask your doctor to measure your risk again in two years' and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

If you are at **moderate risk**, ask your doctor to measure your risk twice a year, and follow the tips for reducing your risk of CVD in this booklet and your doctor's advice.

If you are at **high risk**, ask your doctor for advice and follow it.

How can I reduce my risk factors?

1. Stop smoking and avoid second-hand smoke.
2. Be active every day. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, on most, if not all, days.
3. Avoid adding salt to food. Choose 'no added salt', 'low salt' or 'salt reduced' foods where possible.
4. Eat a variety of foods, including vegetables, wholegrains, lean meats, oily fish, fruit, low fat dairy and vegetable/seed oils. Remember to also eat nuts, seeds and legumes.
5. Take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor.
6. Visit your doctor regularly.
7. Look for resources that may help you to reduce your risk. Start with these websites for lots of helpful information:

   www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
   www.heartfoundation.org.au
   www.kidney.org.au
   www.strokefoundation.com.au.

   (These are the health charities that form the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance. See the back cover for more information.)

What risk factors for CVD can I control?

Risk factors that you can control to reduce your chance of getting CVD include:

- smoking
- making poor food choices
- being overweight or obese
- not getting enough physical activity
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- chronic kidney disease.

What is CVD?

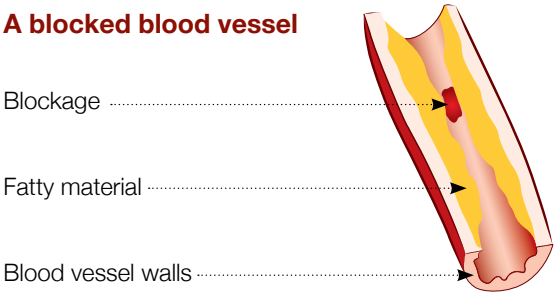
CVD is heart, stroke and blood vessel disease. CVD includes:

- coronary heart disease leading to heart attack and angina
- stroke
- transient ischaemic attacks (mini strokes)
- heart failure
- peripheral arterial disease (diseases of blood vessels in the legs)
- blood clotting problems.

CVD happens when the blood vessels that transport oxygen to different parts of your body gradually narrow. Blood vessels become narrow when fatty material builds up on their walls. This can reduce your blood flow. If a blood clot forms in your narrowed blood vessel and completely blocks the blood supply to important parts of your body, such as your brain or heart, a stroke or heart attack will happen.

Kidney disease and diabetes are closely related to CVD and increase your risk of getting CVD.

A blocked blood vessel



An example of CVD risk measurement

David is a 49–year-old male.

He has smoked a packet of cigarettes every day for the past 20 years.

He has more than five pots/middies of full strength beer at least three times a week.

He has high blood pressure, often measured at 160 mmHg/100 mmHg.

He does not have diabetes.

He has a total cholesterol reading of 6 mmol/L.

He weighs 70 kg.

His father died of stroke at 70 years of age.

His 85-year-old mother is still alive, but has high blood pressure and diabetes.

David's doctor considers these risk factors, as well as whether or not David has any conditions, such as chronic kidney disease, that already put him at high risk of CVD, before calculating his risk.

Using a risk calculator, the doctor works out that David's heart and stroke risk score is **16%**.

What does this mean?

David has a high risk (more than 15%) of experiencing a CVD event, such as heart attack, in the next five years. Therefore, he needs to act **now** to lower his risk.

With help from Quitline, David stops smoking. David's doctor prescribes him blood pressure medicine, which David takes every day. David starts exercising and cuts his salt intake and the amount of take-away food he eats.

In six months, the doctor calculates David's personal risk score again and it is **10–15%**. As a result of his actions, David has successfully reduced his risk of CVD.

The doctor also suggests that David should limit the amount of beer he drinks to help to further lower his risk.

For more information

Diabetes Australia www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
Kidney Health Australia www.kidney.org.au
National Heart Foundation of Australia www.heartfoundation.org.au
National Stroke Foundation www.strokefoundation.com.au

An initiative of the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance

Diabetes AUSTRALIA
KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA
Heart Foundation
strokefoundation

ISBN: 978-1-921226-40-3
CON-064

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