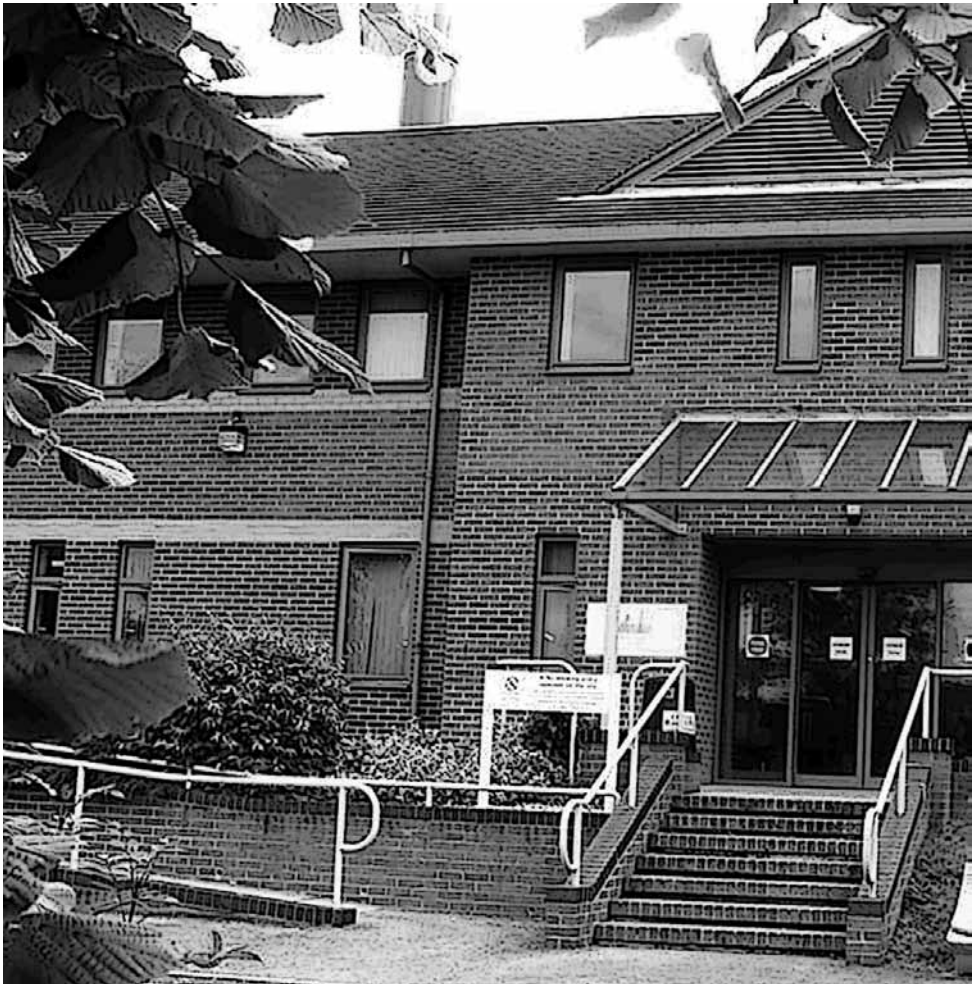


Department of Dermatology, Churchill Hospital

Psoriasis and your heart

Information for patients



Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the western world, and includes heart attacks and strokes.

There is growing evidence to suggest that psoriasis is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

There are several key risk factors which increase your chances of developing cardiovascular disease (heart attacks and strokes).

The risk factors listed below can be modified by lifestyle changes and medication

1. Diabetes
2. High blood pressure (hypertension)
3. High cholesterol/lipid levels in the blood
4. Smoking.
5. Low amounts of exercise
6. An unhealthy diet containing lots of salts, sugars and fats

Each one of these risk factors will increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke. If you have more than one risk factor (eg: have diabetes and smoke), your overall risk of heart attacks and strokes is increased even more.

Recent research suggests that psoriasis is also a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Psoriasis and Cardiovascular disease

OVER THE LAST DECADE, a strong body of evidence has emerged that suggests people with psoriasis may have a slightly increased risk of heart attacks and strokes compared to people without psoriasis. Patients with severe psoriasis are at the greatest risk. In patients with severe psoriasis, the rate of heart attacks and strokes may be two to three times greater than in patients without psoriasis.

It has been known for some time that risk factors such as diabetes, high cholesterol levels and reduced physical activity are more common in individuals with psoriasis than those without psoriasis. However in addition, the inflammation caused by psoriasis appears to also increase your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

In particular, patients whose psoriasis is so severe that they require tablets (such as methotrexate, azathiaprine, ciclosporin), or who have arthritis of their joints may be at the greatest risk.

What should we do about this cardiovascular risk?

IN SHORT, the aim is to **proactively** identify, control and prevent your modifiable cardiovascular risk factors from increasing your risks of a heart attack or stroke. This is done in much the same way as for patients without psoriasis, and may include an annual check up (including measurements of weight, waist size, blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol levels), and advice on how to lead a healthier lifestyle.

THERE ARE 4 KEY STEPS to managing your risk of cardiovascular disease

1. **Find out** whether or not you are in this high-risk group. High risk patients are those with severe skin psoriasis, or psoriasis that affects their joints as well.
2. **Learn** about the size of the excess risk, and what you can do to minimise it.
3. **Assess** your existing risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.
4. Make sure these risk factors are being **controlled** as carefully as possible.

General tips on keeping your heart healthy

Diabetes

First and foremost, diabetes needs to be diagnosed. 1 in 5 people with diabetes don't know that they have diabetes. A diagnosis is usually made by testing levels of glucose in the blood on an empty stomach. The management of diabetes includes a combination of physical activity, weight loss, eating fewer fatty and sweet foods, and medication to control blood glucose levels.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure frequently goes undiagnosed, as it doesn't usually cause symptoms. Over time, high blood pressure can damage your blood vessels and speed up cardiovascular disease. Blood pressure can be controlled by losing weight, doing exercise, reducing your salt and alcohol intake, eating a healthier diet and medicines.

Blood cholesterol

Cholesterol is a type of fat that is made in the body, and consumed in the diet. High cholesterol levels increase your risk of strokes and heart attacks. Cholesterol levels can be measured with a blood test taken on an empty stomach. Lower cholesterol levels can be achieved by eating a healthier diet, exercising regularly and taking medicines called statins.

Smoking

Smoking doubles your risk of a heart attack, and damages blood vessels all around the body. It also increases the likelihood of developing many different types of cancer. Your GP has many different treatments that can increase your chances of successfully stopping smoking.

If you have psoriasis, your Dermatologist may work with your GP to make sure that your risk factors for cardiovascular disease are managed as effectively as possible, to reduce your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

Please be sure to ask your doctor for **information** leaflets on how high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking and high cholesterol can all be managed to keep your heart as healthy as possible.

More information

More information is available from the British Heart Foundation website: www.bhf.org.uk

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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