

Cardiovascular Health

Cardiovascular medical conditions can increase your risk of falling:

Heart problems (e.g. heart failure, arrhythmias), stroke, circulatory diseases and low blood pressure are all risk factors for falls. It is important to maintain optimal cardiovascular health for your general well-being, fall risk management and to prevent cognitive decline.



Cardiovascular conditions:

- Coronary artery disease – where blood vessel/s of the heart narrow reducing blood flow
- Peripheral artery disease – where blood vessel/s in the legs narrow causing cramping pains
- Heart attack – is when one of the heart blood vessels blocks completely, which means the heart muscle doesn't get enough oxygen and starts to die
- Arrhythmias – where the heart beats in an abnormal rhythm e.g. palpitations, fast, skips beats
- Heart failure – is when the heart muscle gets damaged and can't pump blood effectively
- Stroke – there are two types of strokes (ischaemic and haemorrhagic), in both cases the brain doesn't get enough oxygen and brain cells can die
 - Ischaemic is when a blood vessel in the brain is blocked (either by local plaque or by a blood clot that has travelled from somewhere else in the body e.g. heart) and the blood flow is stopped
 - Haemorrhagic is when a blood vessel bursts, causing blood to leak into the brain
- Hypertension – is when your blood pressure is too high
- Hypotension – is when your blood pressure is too low

Maintain good cardiovascular health by:

- Keeping a healthy blood pressure range
- Following a healthy eating pattern
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Participating in regular physical activity
- Being smoke free and limit your alcohol intake (no more than 2 standard drinks per day, less if you have some medical conditions)
- Look after your mental health e.g. depression
- Seeing your doctor regularly and following their recommendations

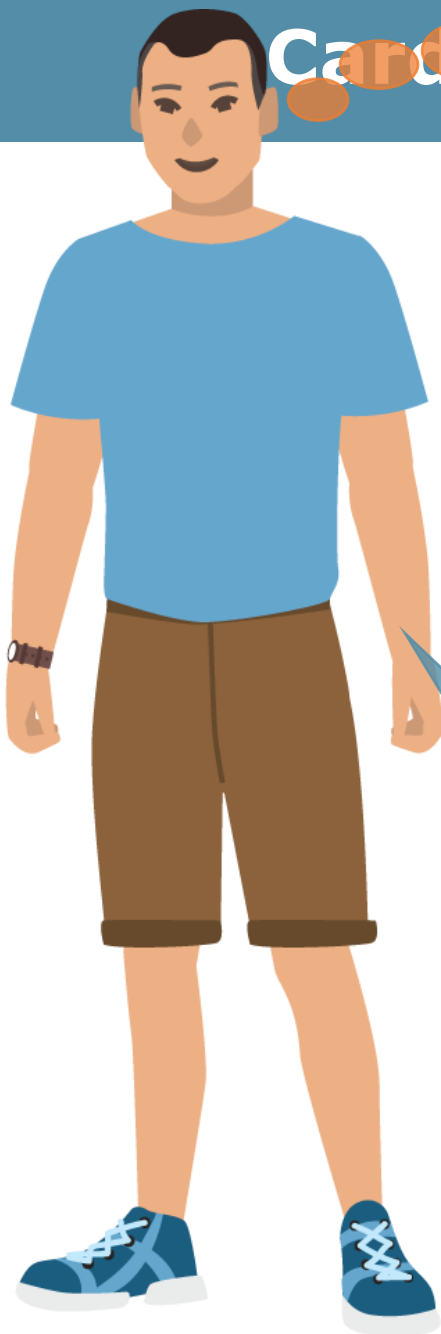
Cardiovascular health and cognitive decline

High blood pressure (mid-life), stroke, heart disease and high cholesterol all increase your risk of dementia. Smoking, diabetes and physical inactivity also increase your risk of dementia.

Cardiovascular health and physical activity

Regular moderate physical activity is good for your cardiovascular health. Any exercise is better than none but aim for 30 minutes most days of the week. If you haven't exercised for a while, start slow with short sessions and gradually build up – talk to your doctor before starting if you haven't exercised for a while or you have chronic health conditions. Physical activity also has mental, cognitive and physical health benefits.

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Key points to remember:

- Some cardiovascular problems can increase your risk of falling e.g. stroke, heart failure and arrhythmias
- Optimising your cardiovascular health is important for your general well-being, managing fall risk and preventing cognitive decline
- There are some simple measures you can take for better cardiovascular health e.g. eat a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight, be physically active, limit your alcohol intake, be smoke free, look after your mental health and keep your blood pressure in the healthy range

What can I do right now?

- Talk to your doctor about your cardiovascular health and cardiovascular risk – make sure that your cardiovascular conditions are optimally managed
- Maintain a healthy weight, follow a healthy eating pattern, be smoke free and limit your alcohol intake
- Be more physically active, aim for 30 minutes most days of the week – if you haven't exercised for a while, start slow with short sessions and gradually build up
- Talk to your doctor before starting if you haven't exercised for a while or you have chronic health conditions
- If you experience symptoms of anxiety or depression talk to your doctor about your options for managing these conditions – also see our Anxiety and Depression Fact Sheet

Tips: For more information about your medical conditions talk to your doctor or health professional. You could also visit:

- Stroke: <https://strokefoundation.org.au/>
- Cardiovascular health: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/>

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs and how to prevent falls, you should seek advice from your health professional. This information was current at the time of development and is generalisable for people >60 years. The associations between your cardiovascular health conditions and falls may not be causal, but we have presented the best evidence at this point in time.