



#StandByHerHRI



STAND BY HER

How to reduce your lifetime risk of cardiovascular disease after pregnancy

Pregnancy is a stress test for your cardiovascular health. If you had preeclampsia or gestational diabetes during your pregnancy, you have an increased risk for developing cardiovascular disease later in life. But there are positive steps you can take now to reduce your long-term risk.

Breastfeed if possible

If there is an opportunity for you to breastfeed, do so, as it will have an added benefit of delaying risk to your cardiovascular health. Research suggests that breastfeeding up to two years across your pregnancies can extend your cardiovascular health by 10 years.

Make the six-week check about you, and baby

The six-week check is standard across Australia. At this time, you will take your baby to see your healthcare team, to check how your baby is progressing. Ensure your own health is also discussed, including any conditions you experienced during your pregnancy, so you and your healthcare professional can make a plan and focus on

your long-term health and wellbeing. Agree how often moving forward you should visit your GP to have your heart health checked.

Know your numbers

Know your blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol numbers, and what this means for you. By learning what's normal for you, you will have a better understanding of your own body, and be better placed to notice if there are any changes you need to be concerned about.

Learn your family medical history

Understanding your family medical history will help your healthcare professional know what conditions you may have inherited. If you can,

talk to family members and try to be as specific as possible in finding out, for example, what category of heart disease was experienced.

Make healthy food choices

Now that a beautiful new life has joined your family, it is a terrific time to make some healthier lifestyle choices, such as enjoying a healthy, balanced diet. This would include plenty of vegetables and fruit, and a good balance of protein, carbohydrate and unsaturated fat.

Get adequate physical activity

Regular physical activity is an important part of maintaining a healthy weight and improving cardiovascular health.

Experts recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes of high intensity exercise per week. For moderate intensity exercise, this means only 30 minutes, five days a week – and this can be broken

down further into smaller chunks, such as two 15-minute brisk walks per day.

Stop smoking

Smoking cigarettes is known to contribute to the development of atherosclerosis. This is a condition where narrowing and clogging of the arteries reduces blood supply, along with the amount of oxygen available, throughout the body. It is the main underlying cause of cardiovascular disease. In addition, smoking can cause lung complications.

Seeking the right support to help you quit will improve your chances of success – and in turn, improve your cardiovascular health.

Take steps to manage stress

Managing your life with a new baby can be challenging and stressful. If you need a hand in coping, reach out to family and friends, or speak to your healthcare professional, who can point you towards other sources of support and advice.