

HEART THROBS



CARDIAC SUPPORT GROUP
CARING FOR YOUR HEART

The ECHO

Heart Throbs Newsletter May 2025

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JOHN'S UPDATE

Jamie's article

In this edition of The Echo you will find an excellent article by Jamie Mclean, explaining the stem cell treatment he is currently undergoing. This is groundbreaking stuff for which we wish Jamie the best of luck and keep our fingers crossed that it proves successful for him.

Recent angiogram

I underwent an angiogram in November supervised by Dr Simon Kennon our patron cardiologist; luckily it showed by pipes to be operating at full bore and there was no need for stents. The upshot however, was an invitation to join the Phase III class, operated by Barnet Hospital Cardiology Department, held at Holtwhites on Thursday mornings. These classes are our primary source of new members so I was pleased to attend and it gave me an opportunity to see what they get up to.

Phase III classes

The classes are supervised by cardiac nurses Stacey and Sandra and the exercise is lead by Jan, the doyenne of cardiac trainers; your progress is monitored very closely and pretty well everyone

shows an improvement over the 8-week course. Jim McCluskey or Barbara Miller attend in the eighth week to invite the class to continue their rehab with us at Heart Throbs and we do get a steady stream of new members from this.



New Heart Throbs class

What was apparent from my group was that pretty well all of them were returning to work once they were signed off and it made me realise that Heart Throbs has very little to offer these patients other than our Monday evening class at St Stephens Church hall. The upshot is that we have now started a Wednesday evening class at 6pm at Holtwhites under the expert tutelage of Hara in an attempt to offer our services to this group of people. Any member can join and we hope the group will be very successful. We offered the class for free during April to build an audience and the early signs are that it will be very popular.

John Golby

The Committee

The committee meets each month except August and January. The Annual General Meeting usually takes place during the summer, details to follow. The committee members are:

John Golby (Chair/Treasurer), Fintan Gallagher (Deputy Treasurer), Stefano Francioso (General Secretary), Jim Yates (Events Manager), Jim McCluskey (Membership Development & NHS Liaison), David Hollifield, Peter Bevan, Deborah Roberts, Anne Cullen (Deputy Events Manager), Corinne Woods (Joint Membership Secretary), Barbara Miller (Joint Membership Secretary) and Catherine McCarthy (Newsletter/Website Editor).

Newsletter suggestions

If you have any suggestions for newsletter items or want to submit an item please contact Catherine at cmccarthy4@sky.com.

Website improvements

If you have any suggestions for improvements to the website please forward them to Catherine at cmccarthy4@sky.com.

Health Matters with Barbara - Charles Dace and his heart

The ups and downs of Charles's heart condition and sailing

Charles and his family are experienced sailors with many adventures at sea. In 2016, whilst sailing, a rogue wave threw him backwards six foot down into the cockpit. He sustained a severe head injury but survived with some pain. Three months after the event he still had a strong pain in his chest. His GP detected a heart murmur. Barnet hospital diagnosed a moderate Mitral Valve leak. By 2022 the leak had progressed to severe requiring surgery and in September 2022 Charles had a Mitral Valve repair at St. Barts. During 2023 he made good progress and after medical consultation was told sailing was possible again. However, hauling up sails, winching and pulling boats alongside caused Charles to faint and after further medical consultation diagnosed atrial fibrillation, which later became atrial flutter. In December 2023 Charles had an ablation with amazing results. As Charles said, "No more stopping halfway up stairs and hills whilst walking." Charles received his second session of Cardio rehabilitation, run by Barnet hospital, and eventually joined Heart Throbs early in 2024. Recent tests show that Charles Mitral Valve is has a slight leak and he has hole in his Aortic Valve. However, his Cardiologist has given him the green light to go sailing again. On the 18th of May until mid June he will be sailing from Gosport, via Plymouth, to Lagos in Portugal.



Life, career and hobbies

Charles was born in the West Germany Military Hospital. His father was a Royal Engineers Army Cartographer working in the Far East and Africa. Charles's mother hailed from Sheffield, where he spent his first six years before crossing the border into Derbyshire. It was here that he gained his love of gardens and the countryside, which strongly influenced his career. He studied Horticulture near York, eventually moving to London in 1982, working as a landscape contracts manager on commercial projects such as Stansted Airport and Chessington World of Adventure. Charles has had various hobbies and additional interests over the years. Hill walking, historical research, Territorial Soldier, visiting jazz and folk clubs, being a Scout leader, including District Commissioner for Potters Bar & District, and of course sailing.

Busy years

Charles met his wife Kate whilst living in Kennington, eventually moving to Potters Bar, when Kate was made a partner in a firm of Chartered Surveyors in Enfield. Charles and Kate faced a difficult time in the 1990's as their first child, a daughter, was still born with no explanation as to why she died. They subsequently had two sons. Life and work became very busy, and Charles became a house husband. During this time, he achieved a first-class Honours degree in Education Studies and History, an M.A. in History and a Post Graduate Diploma in Archives and Record management. He volunteered at the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust in 2009, which led, in 2010, to him being offered a position as archivist at Wrotham Park, which as we know is where he is today.

Family history of heart disease

Charles's paternal grandfather died of heart complications aged 64. His father was diagnosed with a heart murmur in 1947, had a Mitral Valve repair aged 73 and died aged 87 of heart failure. Charles was 63 when he had his valve repair. Charles raised the question of whether his two sons should have a heart check-up. Is his heart condition hereditary? Charles finished by saying "Thank you to all who attend the Friday morning sessions of Heart Throbs and make Cardio recovery bearable".

Barbara Miller

Meet the Committee - John Golby Treasurer/Chair

1) When did you join Heart Throbs?

I had an aortic valve replacement in 2012 and, as it was done privately, I was 'on my own' for rehab. Luckily Annie was listening to the discharge nurses who recommended joining a cardiac exercise group and she found Heart Throbs on-line. I came to my first class with Brad in September 2012; Joan Firth was the secretary then and Rob Bird our chief trainer. I couldn't believe how unfit I was but I stuck with it. Joan invited me to be treasurer a couple of years later and, when she sadly passed, I ended up as Chair as well.

2) What do you enjoy about Heart Throbs?

I like the diversity of people, their different backgrounds and what they did (and some still do) in their working lives. We have all suffered a major cardiac trauma and we all want to go on to lead our best lives.

3) What did you do in your working life?

I'm a Chartered Management Accountant by background and worked for quite a few, generally loss-making companies in the Midlands before I was moved to London by HSBC in 1985. I went on to start my own asset finance business in 1990. I finally retired from paid employment in 2022 and apart from my involvement with Heart Throbs, I am the Chair of a charity, the Ruth Winston Centre which is an activity and resource centre for the over 50's in Palmers Green.

4) What football team do you support?

I'm an Aston Villa supporter, my first visit to Villa Park was in 1959 when we beat West Ham 2-1 and I've been a regular ever since. I was a season ticket holder when we won the then First Division Title and in Rotterdam when we went on to win the European Cup. Heady days – will they ever come back? I hope so, I'm very positive that the current regime will bring us trophies.

5) What's your favourite food?

A meat balti at my favourite restaurant, Adil's in Sparkbrook, Birmingham where the balti was first invented in 1977 (I'm sure I was there on the first night).

6) What's your favourite drink?

Batham's bitter, accompanied by a pork pie and cheese & onion cob at my favourite pub, the Plough at Shenstone in Worcestershire; heaven.

7) What's your favourite holiday destination?

I've been lucky enough to have had a lot of exotic holidays over the years, the best was being at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day 2010 when England bowled out Australia for 98 and were 157 – 0 at the close; it's not possible to better that if you are a cricket fan like me!! The one place I do have on my bucket list is a trip to the islands of the South Pacific. I'd love to see the big stone heads on Easter Island and I've always wanted to visit Pago Pago.

8) Do you have a pet, if so what?

Bertie the Cockerpo, runs Annie & I ragged!



Catherine McCarthy

New members

A warm welcome to all our new members; John Aldridge, Rosemary Antoniou, Michael Clements, Mary Dowson, Omer Kulle, Geraldine Ozer and Frank Repetter.

Heart Throbs Social Events 2025

Our Winter/Spring programme included:

5 December - Quiz Night - "Travelling Home for Christmas"

17 December - Christmas Lunch, Enfield Golf Club

6 February - Paul Davies, former ITN news man - "The Life and Trials of a Television News Man"

6 March - Paul Martin, Paul Martin, our local horology (clocks), antiques and collectibles specialist

18 and 20 March - Visits to Wrotham Park followed by lunch at the Duke of York

3 April - Quiz Night - "The Four Seasons"

Our Summer Programme:

1 May - 80th Anniversary VE Day Celebrations

5 June - Wildlife photography with Robin Claydon

3 July - Stefano's BBQ

If you have any thoughts on relevant topics/guest speakers for our future Social Evenings or any hobbies/interests/career experiences etc. that you might like to present a talk on please contact Jim Yates.

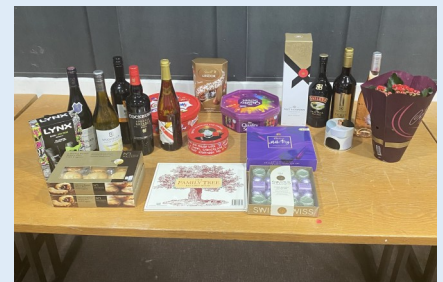
Christmas spirit in classes

In December we got into the Christmas spirit and wore Christmas t-shirts and tops in classes. We had a Christmas tree in the corner and the trainers changed their usual playlist to Christmas themed songs. Deborah opted for Christmas bauble deely boppers, Catherine wore her Last Christmas Wham t-shirt and Christmas bauble headband and Mark wore his jumper with a snowboarding snowman. In Mark's classes he held a competition to bounce the ball into the bin with the lucky winners receiving boxes of mince pies.



Christmas Quiz

On 5th December we held a quiz night with the theme of 'Travelling Home for Christmas' which was very well attended. Topics ranged from Christmas food and drink, Christmas films and plays, where in the world?, trains, planes and automobiles as well as Christmas day events. The quiz was won by the Jelly Babies who received bottles of mulled wine as their prize. A huge thank you to Beverley for being the quiz master and to John for keeping score. The Christmas jumper competition was won by Joan for her elegant sequined bow number. We also had the grand raffle.



Catherine McCarthy

Christmas Lunch

On Tuesday 17 December 2024 we held our end of year Christmas Lunch at Enfield Golf Club. It was organised by Corrine, Jim and John and we had an excellent turn out of 57 members and friends who were able to join us for a delicious lunch and to experience the “Exerciser of The Year “ awards. Jim Yates hosted the event. We toasted absent friends including Peter Lamb, who we lost this year, and shared the names of the nominees for Exerciser of the Year.

“Exerciser of The Year “ - Female

a) **Elizabeth Nathan** has been nominated twice before, is one of our longest serving members, a regular attendee at our weekly fitness classes and social evenings where she provides support.

b) **Christine Bird** is one of our longest serving members, a regular attendee at our weekly fitness classes and social evenings.

c) **Anne Cullen** is a committee member, deputy events manager, a regular attendee at fitness classes and manages the grand raffle at social events to boost funds.

d) **Catherine McCarthy** is a committee member, newsletter and website editor and a regular attendee at fitness classes.

The 2024 Award went to **Elizabeth Nathan!** Elizabeth received an engraved statuette. She also received a polo shirt with our logo and title.



“Exerciser of The Year “ - Male

a) **Rob Ellis** is a regular attendee at our weekly fitness classes, ‘Mr Friday 11 o’clock’.

b) **Maurice King** is a regular attendee at our fitness classes and social events. He also has the smallest bypass scars having been one of the first patients in the country to have a bypass by keyhole.

c) **Peter McCudden** is a regular attendee at our weekly fitness classes especially our 10am classes.

d) **Jim McCluskey** is a committee member for membership recruitment and a regular attendee at fitness classes.

The 2024 Award went to **Peter McCudden!** Peter received an engraved statuette. He also received a polo shirt with our logo and title.



The event ended with a big thank you to John Golby for everything he does to keep Heart Throbs going throughout the year! We also sang happy birthday to Jim Yates!



Catherine McCarthy

Christmas Lunch - Photo Gallery



Catherine McCarthy

Christmas Lunch - Photo Gallery continued



Adaptable implant may be improvement over heart stents

A new device to prop open heart arteries after interventions to unclog them adapts over time to allow restoration of the artery's natural motion and may be an improvement over traditional stents, according to data presented at a medical meeting. Initially, Elixir Medical's DynamX bioadaptor acts like a conventional stent, holding its shape and releasing a drug to prevent reclogging following an angioplasty procedure. But over six months, its coating is resorbed and the chromium-cobalt strands that support the device separate, allowing the artery to grow and adapt to the new blood flow. In a year-long trial of 2,399 patients with heart disease in Sweden, the bioadaptor was associated with lower rates of heart attacks. The benefits were seen in the overall trial population as well as in high-risk subgroups, the researchers noted. The trial results were also published in *The Lancet*.



Stefano Francioso

10 resistance band exercises you can do at home

One of our trainers, Hara Markos, shared her top resistance band exercises to help improve your strength and flexibility on the British Heart Foundation website ([10 resistance band exercises you can do at home - BHF](#)).

Resistance bands are used for strength training and improving balance, flexibility and mobility. They can help build muscle, improve physical function and strengthen bones without having to use heavy weights or signing up to an expensive gym membership.



Catherine McCarthy

Paul Davies - The Life and Trials of a Television News Man

On 6th February we welcomed Paul Davies OBE who is the longest on screen reporter at ITN. There were technical issues as the internet wasn't working so he couldn't show some of his videos. He shared that some of his experiences had been traumatic, some unusual and some fun. He began his career at a local newspaper, moved to local radio, national radio and then television. He explained that he was lucky. He was working at a local radio station when a local family had been kidnapped in Sudan. Paul was sent to Khatoum to report on it. On his flight from Heathrow there were lots of well known reporters. When they landed all the other reporters went through passport control without a problem but Paul didn't have a visa so was held back. He thought he might be sent back to London but was told if he bought the official a bottle of whiskey from duty free he would be allowed to go through which is what he did. By the time he got through all the other reporters had left. He managed to get a lift from someone driving a Bentley who took him to the embassy. While he was there he met the family who had just been released so got a scoop ahead of all the other reporters who only received a standard statement about the release.



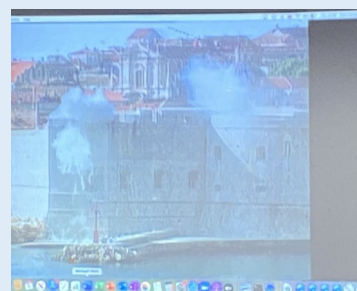
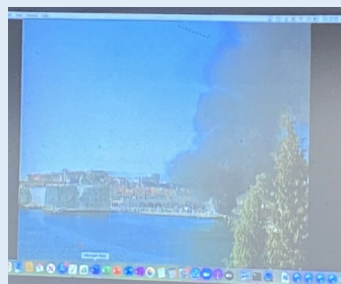
Brighton bomb

In 1984 Paul was a token ITN news reporter at the Tory party conference in Brighton. It was the last night and there were receptions and parties with free flowing food and drink. At 2:45am there was a bomb at the Grand Hotel. Paul sobered up straightaway so he could report on it. 3 floors had collapsed, Margaret Thatcher, her cabinet and MPs were staying there.

Dubrovnik

Paul led a team to Dubrovnik which was at war following the break up of Yugoslavia. They were trapped in the city that was being attacked by Serbian forces. They made duplicate copies of their reports and got them out by hiding them in places such as medical kits. A 14 minute report got through that was broadcast throughout the world which helped bring the war to an end. Paul's report is taught in history lessons today and he has been given Freedom of the City of Dubrovnik.

Paul has been arrested in several countries, has enjoyed a front seat at history being made, met presidents and prime ministers and was honoured with the OBE. He has been affected by his work and stressed by it but has not suffered from post traumatic stress disorder. It was a fascinating talk and we look forward to welcoming Paul back to see the videos and hear more of his stories.



Catherine McCarthy

Paul Martin - Antiques Evening

On 6th March we had another fascinating talk from Paul Martin about antiques. Paul began the evening talking about how the price of gold had gone up and that it's important to go to a reputable organisation if you are planning to scrap gold. He explained that a way to test if something is gold is to see if it will stick to a magnet as gold is magnetic. Also that diamonds need to be checked using a diamond tester as it's almost impossible to check diamonds with the naked eye. He explained how a barometer works and had an example to show us.

Members brought items for Paul to assess and share his insights. There was a post man's alarm clock from 19th century Germany. It had two chains and weights and you set it to how many hours you want to sleep rather than the time to wake up. We also heard about a military bugle, a ship in a bottle, ruby glass, a 1950's Quality Street tin, a Wedgewood jug, a Harrods Millennium bear, a 150 year old doll and many other items.

During the break we looked at the items and checked the five Rolex watches to try and pick out the real one.....they were all fake. Paul explained it is incredibly hard to identify fake watches and often they are only spotted when an owner sends them off to the manufacturer to be serviced..

Thank you to Paul for such a great evening and for donating his fee to The Nightingale Cancer Support Centre. We also had the grand raffle.



Catherine McCarthy

Visits to Wrotham Park

On 18th and 20th March 2025 we enjoyed two visits to Wrotham Park where one of our members, Charles Dace, is the Archivist. 25 of us attended each of the days to find out about this palladian 18th century house that lies on the A1000, between Barnet and Potters Bar. Charles gave us a tour of the house and a fascinating insight into the history of the house and the Byng family who own it. The house was commissioned by Admiral John Byng, who invited the renowned 18th century Architect Isaac Ware to design a house on land he had purchased from the Manor of South Mimms and the disbanded Royal hunting ground of Enfield Chase. Today, much of the money to maintain the house comes from filming. It has been used in Gosford Park, The Crown, Downton Abbey and most recently The Diplomat amongst many others. After the tour we enjoyed lunch at the Duke of York public house before heading home. A huge thank you to Charles and Jim Yates for organising the two days.



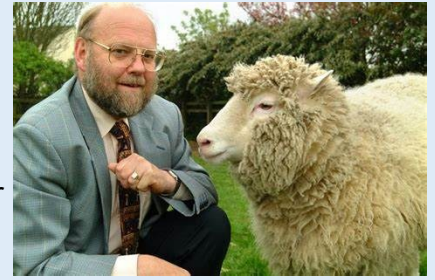
Four Seasons Quiz

On 3rd April 2025 we held we had another fun and very successful quiz night that was very well attended. The theme was the 'Four Seasons' and questions ranged from food and drink, history, geography, sport, films and literature as well as table rounds of car logos and dingbats. The quiz was won by the Waifs and Strays who received bottles of wine as their prize. Thank you to Beverley for being the quiz master and to Deborah for keeping score and allowing John the opportunity to take part this time to join his team the Waifs and Strays. We also had the grand raffle.



How stem cell research could help repair heart attack damage

Chances are you've heard of stem cells. Even if you haven't, you'll know of Dolly the cloned sheep – the original 'poster girl' of this sensational field of scientific research. Dolly's creation in 1996 saw scientists accused of 'playing God', but while stem cell research does raise ethical questions, it may also hold the key to mending hearts damaged by a heart attack and has many other potential uses. "In the past, we couldn't have conceived of these studies," says Chris Denning, Professor of Stem Cell Biology at the University of Nottingham. "But what was once impossible is now possible." He's referring to induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells. Their development won Shinya Yamanaka and John Gurdon the Nobel Prize for Physiology or



RESEARCH
4 The number of specific genes needed to convert a standard human cell into a stem cell

Medicine in 2012. Until recently, to conduct stem cell research scientists needed to obtain human embryonic stem cells from spare IVF embryos with the consent of those involved. These embryonic cells could be coaxed into becoming any human body cell. Today, you can simply take a skin biopsy or a blood sample from a patient, isolate skin or blood cells and, by adding four genes, convince them that they are stem cells.

Patients in a dish

By adding specific growth factors, you can turn iPS cells into beating heart cells in a dish. This means it's possible to study people with heart conditions without conducting invasive procedures. "Imagine you have an inherited heart condition," says Professor Denning (pictured right). "I say: 'I would like to investigate it using some of your heart cells, so I need to crack your chest open and cut out a little piece of your heart. But because the cells only last a few weeks in the lab, can I come back the next week and do the same again?' It's not going to happen. "Now, I can take a skin biopsy, do the genetic programming that turns it into stem cells and keep growing them. We're still working with the same population of cells we reprogrammed in 2008 and all we took was a skin biopsy the size of a matchstick head." Professor Denning uses iPS cells to research inherited conditions that lead to sudden death. "When patients with this condition get stressed or experience strange stimuli, they can start to experience terrible arrhythmias," he explains. "What we're able to do in a lab is mimic the person's condition in a culture dish."



New drug therapies to regenerate dead cells?

'Patients in a dish' could also help create new drugs. "If you're a person with a condition and someone says they want to test 1,000 different drugs in you, you would say 'I think not' – some of them might be harmful," says Professor Denning. "But if you can replicate these things, you can ask if those drugs work when tested in a dish." He says what makes this cutting-edge work worthwhile is seeing the impact it might have on people's lives. "Once in a while, you have a little bit of a breakthrough, but I have to say that the thing that made me happiest was when we published our 2011 paper. Our clinical colleagues forwarded it on to a patient's family and the father replied to thank us for the work we're doing in this area. That is why we're doing it." The British Heart Foundation funds three pioneering Centres of Regenerative Medicine led by Imperial College London and the Universities of Edinburgh and Oxford, working with other top UK universities to study how to regrow, repair or replace damaged or diseased hearts and blood vessels. Thanks to BHF research and the people who support us, there is real hope that stem cells can be used to repair the damaged heart in future. Heart and circulatory disease kills one in four people in the UK, but stem cell research holds real promise to help us save lives in the future. ([How stem cell research could help repair heart attack damage - BHF](#))

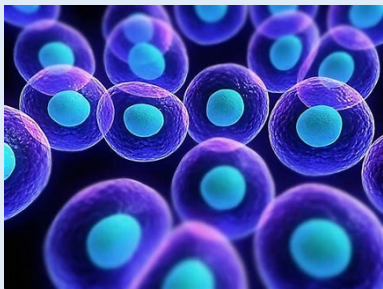
Jamie McLean

Jamie McLean - stem cell research participant

My name is Jamie Mclean, as some of you already know, I suffered a cardiac arrest on the 2nd February 2023. It was a massive shock to my system and obviously to myself and my family as I was a very strong, athletic fit 51 year old man. I had never smoked, only drank socially or when I went to the Arsenal! I have always been mindful of the food I eat and have taken exercise most days. Initially my recovery after the cardiac arrest was very slow and I struggled with the most minor of tasks. It was very upsetting at an early scan post arrest to be told that I had only been left with around a quarter of my heart function. The remaining heart was very badly scarred and could not regenerate. I appreciate how lucky I have been in that I am still alive, however, it's been really challenging to have had my old life taken away from me.



In the months that followed the arrest I followed all the advice from my amazing cardiac teams at Barnet, Royal Free and Harefields. I have my medication updated and changed accordingly and take around 15 - 16 tablets a day. I had been lucky enough before to never need any regular medication. I started to make slow but steady progress and felt more confident with my changed abilities. In the summer of last year, my cardiologist, Nina Karia at the Royal Free spoke to me



about being put forward for a research project. She felt I would be a very good candidate as my level of fitness and dedication would meet the criteria. The project was based at St Barts headed by Professor Anthony Mathur. It was for stem cell therapy for heart failure patients. This is NOT available in the UK in a private capacity or on the NHS. This is purely on compassionate grounds for research purposes. After meeting Dr Perera at St Barts and being assessed I was thrilled and excited to be accepted.

I was due to begin the procedure in December, however, somebody pulled out of an earlier group and they called me to see if I was able to go in sooner! I literally went in within a few days of the call. I went to St Barts 11th November 2024 where I was taken to a ward where I would stay for the next 7 days. The procedure was as follows: Each morning over five days I was given GCSF (Granulocyte-colony stimulating factor, a synthetic version of naturally occurring growth factor) injections which boosts the stem cells. I rested during the day. Then on day 6 I had a bone marrow aspiration to harvest stem cells for inter-coronary stem cell fusion. This was taken from me using a large needle from my lower back. This was uncomfortable but bearable! I then returned to the ward where I waited for about 5 hours whilst everything was sent to the lab to be separated. The stem cells and bone marrow are separated then sent back. I then returned to the operating theatre where a catheter was inserted into my right wrist. This was similar to having a stent inserted. They then used a rod like instrument to inject the stem cell into the scarred, damaged part of my heart. I was awake for both of the procedures but reinsertion was definitely more challenging! It was a very alien and uncomfortable feeling. Recovery was fast though. I was discharged the next day.



That was coming up to 6 months ago, which was the timescale I had been told I could possibly start to feel/see improvements. Over the last few months I have definitely felt stronger and more positive and feel I am moving in the right direction. I have had 2 phone follow up appointments and am due to see the team in November this year on my one year anniversary of the procedure. I understand I will have a scan at that time to assess progress.

Jamie McLean

The Truth about Cholesterol

Cholesterol and heart disease

High cholesterol can cause heart problems and strokes – but levels can creep up without showing any symptoms. This is why, if you're over 40, you should be getting your cholesterol checked every five years. It's a simple enough concept, but, like alcohol and other things that could be slowly, invisibly damaging our bodies, cholesterol can feel a little abstract, hovering in the background less urgently than everything in the foreground of a busy life. It doesn't help when myths are flying about online, such as eggs being unhealthy because they contain cholesterol. Or when some fringe scientists and proponents of low-carb and high-fat diets dramatically downplay cholesterol's significance in heart disease – arguing that sugar is a bigger risk to our health, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Nor does it help us laypeople that there are so many different ways to present – and therefore interpret – cholesterol levels. And yet, says Manuel Mayr, a cardiologist and professor at Imperial College London, it's important to act early to avoid levels creeping up: "Take prevention very seriously, because if your cholesterol is high, if it's over decades, it builds up in your arteries." When it comes to high levels of bad cholesterol, blockages can cause cardiovascular disease and could result in heart attacks and strokes. "The lifetime exposure is what damages the vessels over time," Mayr adds.



What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol, says Emily McGrath, a senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation (BHF), "is a fatty substance that is found naturally as part of your circulation". We need a certain amount, says Tracy Parker, a senior dietitian at the same organisation, "for making things like hormones – like oestrogen and testosterone. And our cells need cholesterol to make them rigid and firm and solid. But when those levels go high, that's a problem." Our bodies make cholesterol, but levels are also affected by lifestyle and genetics. There are two kinds of cholesterol in the blood. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is known as "bad cholesterol" because too much can cause plaque to build up in the arteries, increasing the risk of heart attack or stroke. High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is the good one. "HDL helps your liver to metabolise and reabsorb LDL into the bloodstream," says McGrath, meaning HDL helps keep LDL levels in balance. "What has been shown in numerous studies is that if you lower your bad cholesterol," says Mayr, "you reduce cardiovascular events."



When should you get your cholesterol checked?

The NHS advises five-yearly checks for those aged 40-74, with annual health checks for people 75 and over, says McGrath. "But if there are concerns over family history of heart disease, or if you're suffering with angina-type chest pain, anyone is entitled to ask their GP for a check."

What do the tests show?

Healthy HDL levels should be above 1mmol/L for men or 1.2mmol/L for women. "I don't think I've ever heard of somebody saying they've got too high HDL," says McGrath. LDL levels are considered healthy if below 3mmol/L. You should also get a cholesterol ratio number, which compares how much good (HDL) cholesterol you have within your total cholesterol levels. It is your total cholesterol divided by your HDL levels, and is considered healthy if below six – the lower the better. (The truth about cholesterol: 12 things you need to know – from eggs to weight to statins | Health & wellbeing | The Guardian)

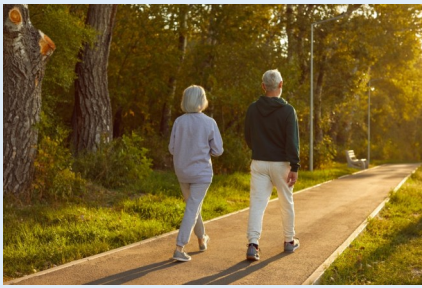
2 Years of Exercise Reversed Heart Aging by 20 Years in 50 Year Olds

At 50, the heart naturally begins to show signs of aging. Its elasticity diminishes, its efficiency declines, and the risk of cardiovascular disease rises. But a groundbreaking study has uncovered something extraordinary. With the right exercise regimen, the heart doesn't just slow its aging - it can, in many ways, turn back time. The data reveals that a 50-year-old's heart can regain the function and resilience of one two decades younger. But how does this transformation happen? What kind of exercise holds the power to reverse heart aging? And most importantly, how can these findings be applied to everyday life?



Breakthrough study

For years, cardiologists have studied the effects of exercise on heart health, but a recent breakthrough study sought to answer a bold question: Can structured physical activity actually reverse the aging of the heart? To find out, researchers recruited a group of 50-year-olds and placed them on a carefully designed two-year exercise program. This wasn't just about staying active it was a targeted approach combining aerobic exercise, interval training, and strength conditioning. Each session was designed to challenge the cardiovascular system, forcing the heart to adapt and grow stronger. To measure changes in heart function, scientists used cutting-edge imaging techniques, including echocardiograms, MRIs, and stress tests. These tools provided a detailed view of how the heart was responding - whether its muscles were regaining elasticity, how efficiently it was pumping blood, and whether signs of aging were being reversed at a biological level. The results were nothing short of remarkable. Participants' hearts showed significant improvements in flexibility and function. The heart muscle, which naturally stiffens with age, regained its ability to relax and contract more efficiently. Blood flow improved. The heart became more resilient, more efficient, mirroring the performance of a much younger organ. This wasn't just a small improvement; it was a transformation. And the best part? The key to unlocking it was something anyone could access: movement.



The heart thrives on challenge

The heart, like any muscle, thrives on challenge. When pushed beyond its comfort zone, it adapts, strengthens, and rebuilds itself from the inside out. But how exactly does movement have the power to turn back time on the heart? Aerobic exercise plays a central role in this transformation. When the body moves whether through running, cycling, or swimming - the heart rate increases, demanding more oxygen. This repeated challenge forces the heart muscle to become more efficient, improving its ability to pump blood with each beat. Over time, the heart works less at rest, conserving energy and reducing the risk of disease. Interval training takes this process even further. Short bursts of intense activity, followed by periods of rest, condition the heart to handle stress more effectively. This type of training improves heart rate variability, a key marker of heart health, allowing the cardiovascular system to respond quickly and efficiently to daily demands. Strength training also plays a critical role. While it primarily builds skeletal muscle, it indirectly benefits the heart by improving overall body mechanics. Stronger muscles mean less strain on the cardiovascular system, allowing the heart to function with greater ease. Beyond muscle growth, exercise triggers biochemical changes that keep the circulatory system young. It encourages the production of molecules that maintain the elasticity of blood vessels, preventing arteries from stiffening - a major contributor to heart disease. (Howden, E. J., Sarma, S., Lawley, J. S., Opondo, M., Cornwell, W., Stoller, D., Urey, M. A., Adams-Huet, B., & Levine, B. D. (2018). Reversing the cardiac effects of sedentary aging in Middle Age - A randomized controlled trial).

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