



TICKER NEWS

Official newsletter of the North Gwent Cardiac
Rehabilitation and Aftercare Charity



The most ~~magical~~ ^{stressful} time of the year

For women in particular, Christmas can be a source of stress. But how does stress affect heart health, and what steps can you take to manage it more effectively?

With Christmas just around the corner it's easy to get caught up in the stress and chaos it causes. Your busy life becomes even more hectic as extra shopping, cooking, and spending create additional anxiety. And with so much going on, you may feel it's simply easier to ignore the symptoms of heart disease and to put the demands of friends and family before your own health needs.

Perhaps you take pride in being able to accomplish a multitude of tasks and trying to be everything to everyone. But the extra pressure and responsibilities at Christmas can feel overwhelming, and this can have a negative impact on both your physical and mental health.

Heart disease is one of the leading causes of death for men and women. So taking care of heart health is important, and that includes avoiding risk factors or behaviours that lead to heart disease, recognising the symptoms, and seeking treatment if you experience the signs.

Risk factors for heart disease

As you may know, the main risk factors for heart disease include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking and obesity. But stress, anxiety and depression also affect heart health, in particular the kind of intense stress caused by divorce, family conflicts, death of a loved one, prolonged illness or natural disasters.

What's more, studies tell us that depression and stress are associated with heart attacks and can also have a negative effect on recovery.

How does stress lead to heart attacks?

Exactly how stress leads to a heart attack is still being studied. But we do know that it can increase blood pressure and result in hypertension, which leads to heart disease and plaque build-up in the coronary arteries. Stress can also raise the level of cortisol (a stress hormone) circulating in your body, and this can affect clotting and how your body controls involuntary functions such as heart rate and blood pressure. And of ▶

Advance Notice – Annual General Meeting

You are invited to attend the **Annual General Meeting** of the
North Gwent Cardiac Rehabilitation and Aftercare Charity.

Date: Tuesday 29 November 2022 Time: 6pm

Venue: Nevill Hall Education Centre, Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny NP7 9EX.

If attending, please email tandjlowery@btinternet.com by Monday 21 November 2022.

course stress also can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as eating too much, substance abuse, and not exercising.

Managing holiday stress

Christmas can bring the most cherished moments, but it can also be the most stressful time of year. You may carry expectations influenced by memories and social pressures — a happy smiling family photo, the tempting aromas of home cooking, seeing a beautifully decorated Christmas tree, or singing your favourite carol. However, these visions don't always match reality, and that can result in stress.

At any time, but especially during the festive period, the key to coping is setting realistic expectations. Try taking a few moments to write down what would make the holidays an enjoyable time with those you love. And let go of the things that add stress and no joy.



Dear Member...

Have you ever wondered if going to your Cardiac Rehab Exercise Class is making you fitter? Or would you like to have a report on your progress? Well, I have some great news: this month we're starting **Cardiac Rehab Health Assessments** for all our members. Fitness Instructor Tom Stone tells you about this in more detail below.

The number of people attending our classes is slowly increasing and we hope that our **new video** will attract even more. You can watch it on our **Ticker Network** Facebook page and on our website, **cardiac-rehab.org**. Thank you to all of you who took part.

We were shocked and saddened to hear that former Fitness Instructor **Adrian Woods**, an international mountain runner and dedicated coach, passed away in September (see page 7). He will be greatly missed by us all.

With Christmas on the horizon, and particularly with women in mind, I thought that our main article on **managing stress** would be useful! And talking about stress, member **John Mason** (soon to return to our Monmouth Class) tells us about a particularly nail-biting afternoon he

endured while working in Eastern Europe in 1990 (page 6). Meanwhile on page 7, **Tim Cross**, another of our regular contributors, passes on more "helpful" advice from his furry friends, Tigger and Zara.

Lastly, we'd like to invite you and your family to our new **Cardiac Christmas Market**, on 11 December at Llanfoist Village Hall. Doors open at 2pm, and there'll be loads of stalls, free creative activities for the kids, and plenty of ways to get involved. See pages 4-5 for more details.

On behalf of the Trustees and our Fitness Instructors, I would like to wish you and your family a very **happy Christmas and a healthy New Year**. And we look forward to seeing you on 11 December.

Jacky

Health assessments for a healthier you

Thanks to help from the National Lottery Community Fund, we can now offer members an annual Cardiac Rehab Health Assessment. Fitness Instructor **Tom Stone** explains what they are and how they'll work...

Members frequently tell me of the benefits they feel from attending their Cardiac Rehab Exercise Classes — mainly for the health benefits of leading an active lifestyle, but also the joy from social interaction.

But we wanted to be able to give members a quantifiable measure of health and wellbeing achieved from attending classes. So in January 2022 we offered free trial health assessments to members of the Llanfoist class. The assessments consisted of blood pressure and body measurements, which can be used to gain an idea of current health, alongside a fitness test to measure aerobic ability.

The pilot was very successful, with members presented with a personal record of their assessment, including guidance on what the data meant,

and advice on any lifestyle changes that would benefit them.

Subsequently the Trustees agreed that it would be good to extend the scheme to all members, and thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, we can now offer annual and possibly even bi-annual health assessments to all class members. These health checks will allow members and instructors to gauge current health levels and monitor improvement.

Starting in November, assessments will be offered to all members via your class instructor. To make sure there are enough participants, and enough space to conduct all the checks, instructors may need to combine classes and use a bigger hall, which for some members may mean travelling to a different venue.



We're still finalising the details, but in the meantime, if you'd like to take part in this very useful programme, please speak to your class instructor.

For updates, keep an eye on The Ticker Network Facebook Group or visit our website, cardiac-rehab.org.uk.

8 STEPS TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE STRESS

1. Increase physical exercise

Find an exercise routine that works for you. This can include daily walks or bike rides, as well as your Cardiac Rehab class. Start slowly and gradually increase your pace and distance as you become fitter.

2. Practice relaxation

Incorporate muscle relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, into your daily routine to help you deal with anxiety and stress.

3. Seek professional help

Get an annual physical and talk to your health care provider about your health, including stress.

4. Eat a healthy diet

Opt for wholegrains, a variety of fruits and vegetables, low-fat or fat-free dairy



products and lean meats. Avoid added sugars, saturated fats or trans fats, and high amounts of salt.

5. Limit alcohol

One simple way to cut down is to have at least a few drink-free days every week. But swapping to lower-strength drinks, such as lighter beers

(under 4% ABV) or no-alcohol alternatives is also a great step in the right direction. And there are some really great-tasting alternatives to alcohol available now.

6. Stop smoking

If you smoke, plan to quit.

7. Connect to your spirituality

Spirituality has many definitions, but at its core it helps give you a clearer purpose and a greater connection to others and the world around you. It's not necessarily aligned to a specific belief system or even religious worship. Try prayer or meditation, or keep a journal to express your feelings and focus your attention.

8. Monitor your heart health

Know your numbers for your blood pressure, blood glucose and your cholesterol levels.

Words: Niti Aggarwal MD (2021), Mayoclinichealthsystem.org

Get involved in our festive fundraisers

26 November

Christmas Cocktail Classes

Join us for a fun cocktail making session at The Balcony, Abergavenny's coolest cocktail bar. Chief mixologist **Ben Ward** will be showing how to shake, muddle and mix up three fabulous seasonal cocktails, with nibbles to match. Cost is **£30 per person** and the afternoon classes are already sold out. But the good news is there are still places available for the two later classes. Choose from 6pm-8pm or 8pm-10pm. To book your place, call Ben on 07955 203171.



13 December

Grand Christmas Draw – win up to £300!

Help us raise funds for the coming year with our annual **Grand Christmas Draw**. You'll find your ticket books enclosed with this newsletter. Tickets are priced at £1 each, and this year's prizes are set at **£75, £150 or a whopping £300**, with the draw taking place on **13 December**. Will you be the one to sell (or buy!) the lucky winning numbers? If you'd like more tickets, please contact your Fitness Instructor or call **Kath Cleveland on 01873 830829**.



16 December

Christmas Raffle

We've got some fantastic luxury prizes lined up for our **Christmas Raffle**, and we'll be selling tickets at the Christmas Cocktail Classes and at our Cardiac Christmas Market. Or you can buy them from Ashella on our fundraising team. Just email her at lloveyousensory@outlook.com. Tickets cost **£1 per strip**, with the draw taking place on **16 December**.

11 December

Cardiac Christmas Market

Get the festive season off to a cracking start with fun for all ages at our **Cardiac Christmas Market**, at Llanfoist Village Hall, from 2pm-5pm on Sunday 11 December.

Discover stalls laden with **gorgeous gifts** and crafts from inspiring local businesses; get the little ones involved in **free creative activities**; name the bear; guess the weight of the Christmas cake, and **loads more**, including delicious refreshments.

Entry is free. And did we mention there'll be warming mulled wine and cider?



Bring a bauble

Can't make it to our Cardiac Christmas Market? You can still help out by **donating a festive bauble** for our fundraising Christmas Bauble Stall.

Just bring your chosen decoration along to class before 8 December for collection by your Fitness Instructor or Class Assistant. Oh, and remember to leave the price tag on! We'll spread the love by only charging half the retail price.

Love a bit of Bake-Off?

Put your baking skills to the test by entering our Cardiac Christmas Market **cake-making contest**.

It's your chance to show off a **tried-and-tested family favourite**, or to get as **creative as you dare** and try something new. Judging will be strictly impartial, and the only rules are that your creation must be a cake, and it must be baked.

Up for the challenge? Then please **submit your entry on the day**, between 1:45pm and 2:15pm. The winner will receive a **magnificent trophy**, and all entries will be sold on the day to help us raise funds for the coming year.



HARD DAY'S AFTERNOON

John Mason, of the Monmouth class, shares this fascinating account of doing business in Eastern Europe, shortly after the Iron Curtain was lifted

It was August 1990 and the week had started badly. The boss had just called to tell me that the short-term loan already promised by the UK head office was no longer available.

'Where does that leave us?' I asked. 'On your own, John,' was his response.

Indeed I was – Eastern Europe, in a country fresh out of communist shackles, my time taken up with getting a new venture off the ground in partnership with a local firm. I was working for a South Wales-based group in the energy business, with interests in Western Europe and the US. My job was to manage risk in new projects.

The modernisation scheme in Poland had gone to plan but, as forecast, more working capital was required. The problem was that the previous week our Polish partners had told us they were unable to meet their commitment of \$250k, as specified in the contract. I had passed the news to my head office. No problem, they said, the business is going well; we will cover the shortfall.

But now it was back to square one. I telephoned connections in London. No joy: 'Ring again in a couple of months after the holidays,' they said. My next call was to Ewa, accountant for the joint venture. She was Polish and spoke Russian and French, but no English. I could only manage a few words in Polish, so we communicated via my O-Level French. I asked her to investigate the prospects of a loan from a financial institution in the south of the country. She rang back later to say she had arranged an appointment for the following day with the director of the local commercial bank.

Early start for the three-hour drive south. Fuel in short supply: thank God for a full tank in the Audi.

The meeting began at 2pm with the bank director's speech of welcome. Panni Dubrowska made it clear that negotiations would be in Polish. She had a copy of the joint venture cash flow forecast on the table in front of her. Ewa acted as interpreter for the three-way Polish/French/English discussion. I responded by emphasising the benefits, not only to

the local economy, employment prospects and so on, but also at the national level, as the output was to be exported to Sweden and what was then Czechoslovakia, with payment in US dollars.

Discussions continued slowly, but suddenly around five o'clock the atmosphere changed. After a silence the director said in English: 'This is good project and the bank is pleased to offer a loan to the joint venture equivalent to \$250,000 US in Polish zloty, at today's rate of exchange.

'Terms: Narodny Bank Polski official rate of interest, repayable one year from today. Do you accept?'

Oh yes, in spite of the ferocious rate of interest – some 60%. We shook hands.

She smiled as she added, 'Plus of course my bank's usual fee of \$10,000.'

Reader, I'm happy to report that business went well, and the loan was repaid in full just seven months later.

Farewell to Adrian

Some very sad news reached us a few weeks ago of the passing of Adrian Woods, one of our former Cardiac Rehab Fitness Instructors, at the age of 61. A very fit and sporty man, he represented Wales as a fell runner and managed the fell running team, competing internationally for several years.

Ade struggled for a few years with depression, but no one would have thought he would die suddenly from a cardiac arrest. It was a real shock to all who knew him.

He will be sorely missed by his family, friends and a host of other people who he has motivated and encouraged over the years with his boundless enthusiasm for promoting a healthy active lifestyle.

More than anything he loved running up on the Bloreng mountain, and that is where his ashes have been laid. Our thoughts are with his wife Sharon and his close family. R.I.P.



Adrian, centre, with fellow Fitness Instructors Ian James and Helen Sanchez, at their leaving party in July 2021.

A joint communique from Tigger the cat and Zara the dog



As family pets of cardiac class members, we know that most of you will be wondering how to treat us. We feel that as one of us is a cat and the other is a dog, we have a lot to tell you based on our knowledge of life and understanding of medicine. Those of you who have read our previous articles may have the impression that there is some

rivalry between us. There is some, of course, but we can easily come together in peace and harmony to share our advice. We're sure that goldfish and canaries will have their own opinions, but of course we can't speak for them!

So here are some little things that you can do...

Food: always prepare more food than you can eat. But when you have surplus food, don't overeat! Put the leftovers in our bowls. We'll always help finish anything you don't; it's part of the service we offer to help keep you at a healthy weight.

Sleep: when you go to bed, make yourselves comfortable then don't move. We'll jump in and occupy any spare space. Just leave a bit extra duvet or blanket so that we can cover ourselves. If we need to get up in the night, don't worry about us! We'll let ourselves out and back in. Just leave

the door/catflap open for us (not sure Zara's mistress will buy that one). Did we mention to leave some food and water in our bowls. Nothing fancy. Some fish and biscuit will suffice. Only we don't mind having a little snack on the way back in after a nocturnal outing... Or any other time we're feeling peckish...

Exercise: we'll take you on a walk almost any time you want. Feel free to stick to a tedious route round the local housing estate, although Zara may prefer a good run in Vauxhall Fields. We don't want to constrain you. We're worried that you'll find our adventures too exciting. But make sure your exercise is regular. We always compare notes with our friends from the neighbourhood and we don't want to let our "owners" become careless.

This article was helpfully typed out by Tigger and Zara's "owner", **Tim Cross**, of the Monmouth class.



Get started today

To join one of our **Cardiac Rehab Exercise Classes**, you'll need an NHS referral.

If you've been referred by your **hospital cardiac rehabilitation team**, one of our **Fitness Instructors** will be in touch to invite you along to their class:

Tom Stone – Llanfoist, Abertillery and Usk

Maja Baraskiewicz – Llanfoist and Monmouth

Callum Simmonds – Blaenavon, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo and Tredegar

Alternatively, **Speak to your GP** about getting a referral for our classes. You can download a referral form from our website, cardiac-rehab.org.uk.

Classes cost **£4.50 per session** (£4 for annual members). For details of days and times and for more information, please visit cardiac-rehab.org.uk.

Alternatively, please email cardiaccarecommunity@outlook.com or call our secretary, Tony Lowery, on **07938 549 801**.



Here's what our members are saying...

'I have become stronger and more confident and have returned to normal life after a serious medical condition' – *Mavis, 72*

'The improvement I have made over the past 12 months is incredible: I can't believe where I am now' – *John, 54*