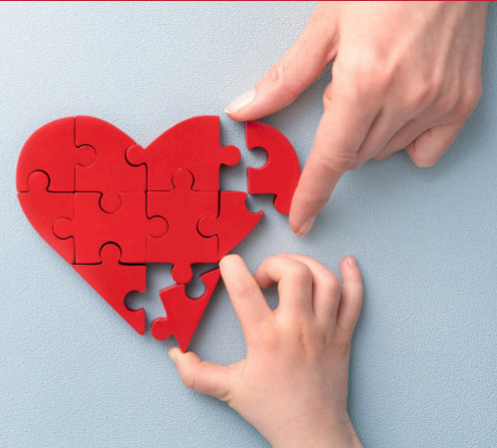




TICKER NEWS

Official newsletter of the North Gwent Cardiac Rehabilitation & Aftercare Charity



Alcohol and your heart

Whether you're taking part or not, Dry January is the perfect time to think about how much you drink and the impact it may be having on your heart health

If you have a heart problem, drinking alcohol can make things worse. It's important to understand the risks, so you can make informed decisions about your lifestyle.

Blood pressure

The British Heart Foundation warns that regularly drinking too much alcohol can increase your blood pressure. High blood pressure, or hypertension, puts extra strain on your heart muscle and, over time, can increase your risk of developing serious problems such as heart disease, chronic kidney disease and stroke.

Weight gain and cholesterol levels

Alcohol contains a lot of calories, so regular drinking can lead to weight gain, a risk factor for both high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. Alcohol can also affect your cholesterol levels, reducing "good" HDL cholesterol and increasing the amount of "bad" LDL cholesterol and triglycerides (another type of fat)



circulating in your blood. This can lead to a build of fatty deposits in your arteries, making them narrower and forcing your heart to work harder.

The red wine myth

You may have heard that drinking red wine is good for your heart. But while some studies suggest there may be a link between moderate red wine consumption and lower rates of heart disease, recent research has shown that

the risks of drinking alcohol far outweigh any potential benefits.

Safe limits?

If you're a regular drinker, you may feel that alcohol doesn't affect you, but that usually means you've developed a tolerance to some of the effects. The UK Chief Medical Officers advise drinking no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. They also recommend spreading this over at least three days, with several alcohol-free days a week and no bingeing. However, if you have a heart problem, please ask your health professional for advice.

The good news!

When you stop drinking, or reduce the amount you drink, you should see an improvement in your blood pressure – usually within a few days. You should sleep better, too, and start to enjoy other benefits to your health and wellbeing.

▶ Turn the page for members' thoughts on drinking and Dry January...

What is a unit of alcohol?

One unit equals 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol. That's how much alcohol your body can process in an hour. But because different types of drinks contain different percentages of alcohol (sometimes written as ABV), working out your units can be confusing. As a basic guide, here are three common examples of what one unit of alcohol looks like...



Your thoughts on drinking and Dry January

Our Class Assistant **Allen Cleveland** asked class members for their views on drinking and Dry January. Here's what you told him...

Keith Davies, Ebbw Vale – "I rarely drink during the week, but on Friday I'll buy a bottle of red wine and enjoy half on Saturday and the other half on Sunday."

Howard Robinson, Ebbw Vale – "I'm on two different blood thinner tablets, one in the morning and one in the evening. I have one drink every night, and the nurse has told me to carry on with this, because a change might upset my blood readings."

David Leyland, Abertillery – "I rarely drink, although the other day I really fancied a sherry. But when I went to the drinks cupboard it was empty. My daughter told me she'd poured all the alcohol away because drinking wasn't good for my health!"

Martin Morgan, Blaenavon – "I rarely drink at home, but I go to Corfu two or three times a year for three to four weeks at a time. I'll drink when I'm there, but my relatives only allow me to have a maximum of four drinks a week!"

Kath Cleveland, Llanfoist – "Allen and I both enjoy an occasional drink but we have number of celebrations this January, so we're not doing Dry January."

Richard Best, Tredegar – "I was drinking heavily and taking drugs up until October 2023, when I decided to mend my ways. I started Cardiac Rehab classes at Fresh Active gym in September last year and I'm really enjoying the benefits. I'm intending to do Dry January every month!"

Bernard Nipper, Ebbw Vale – "I like a variety of drinks but my doctor has advised me to abstain due to the sugar levels. So yes, I'm doing Dry January."

Des Price, Blaenavon – "I'll drink moderately for a couple of months and then abstain for two months on a regular basis. That means sometimes I do Dry January, and sometimes I don't."

Cathy Smith, Llanfoist – "Rather than saying I shouldn't drink at all, my doctor advised me to use my discretion. So I'll have an occasional red wine, or a gin with a flavoured mixer."



3 top tips for cutting down on alcohol

- ✓ **Set clear goals:** for example, aim to have at least three alcohol-free days per week.
- ✓ **Find alternatives you enjoy:** there are some excellent low- and no-alcohol options available now, including beers, wines and spirit-alternatives.
- ✓ **Change your social habits:** plan activities that don't revolve around drinking. Suggest going for a walk or seeing a movie rather than going to the pub.

FUNDRAISING ROUND-UP

Rockin' it at the Moose!

Thanks to all who attended our 60s music night at the Moose Hall in Tredegar at the end of November. Valleys covers band Now & Then had everyone up on the dance floor, and during the break, Phil Miles gave our brain cells a thorough workout with his fiendishly difficult pop quiz.

And a massive thank you to our **Trustee Neil Gregory** of G.O.S Tool & Engineering Services for supplying a magnificent Christmas hamper for the raffle. Altogether the evening raised a fab £700. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did!



QUICK QUIZ

February is Heart Month, so in preparation we've compiled this quick five-question quiz to test your heart-health knowledge. For answers see the back page...

1 Staying well hydrated is key to good health, but how much fluid should you aim to drink per day?
A 3-4 cups or glasses (1-1.4 litres)
B 6-8 cups or glasses (2-2.5 litres)
C At least 3 litres
D As much as you can manage!

2 Keeping your blood sugar levels under control is important for managing inflammation and heart disease. Which of the following can cause your blood sugar to spike?
A An artificially sweetened soft drink
B A snack of fat-free fruit-flavoured yogurt
C A bag of BBQ-flavour crisps
D A slice of cake after a meal of steamed veg and salmon.

3 True or False? Vaping instead of smoking is a safe choice for people with heart disease.

4 People with gum disease are at greater risk of which of the following health problems?
A Bleeding gums and bad breath
B Tooth loss
C Diabetes
D Coronary heart disease.

5 Routinely getting less than 6-8 hours sleep a night can cause which of the following side effects?
A Overeating and weight gain
B Reduced immune system
C Inflammation
D Coronary heart disease.

Instructors' Study Day will benefit our classes

The British Association for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation (BACPR) is the gold standard for cardiac rehab exercise training in the UK. That's why we insist that all our instructors are qualified through the BACPR.

As well as providing specialist exercise instructor training and additional courses (see Tom's story below), the BACPR also gives instructors a chance to network

and share best practice, and to expand their knowledge further by carrying out research and attending conferences and study days.

We understand the importance of supporting continuing professional development, and the benefits this can bring to our classes. So this year we've offered to fund one of our instructors plus a member of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board's Phase 3 Cardiac Rehab Team

to attend the BACPR's Spring Study Day at Aston University at the end of March. They'll be reporting back on their experience in Ticker News in due course.



IMAGE: Freepik (www.freepik.com)

Cardiac rehab exercise: a case of HIIT or MISS?

Our Llanfoist Class Instructor Tom Stone attended a BACPR training course recently and discovered that new research is changing the way we think about cardiac rehab exercise

As a Cardiac Rehab Exercise Instructor, I'm always looking to increase my knowledge in this area. I recently attended a course run by the BACPR on delivering High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) to people with stable coronary heart disease (CHD).

We know that exercise training can improve cardiorespiratory fitness and quality of life for people with CHD, but sometimes it's not effective. I was there to find out if the intensity of exercise training was important and could make a positive difference.

Traditionally, cardiac rehab (CR) focuses on Moderate Intensity Steady-State (MISS) exercise training. That means exercising at a moderate intensity for 20-40 minutes.

By contrast, HIIT is short bursts of high-intensity maximal effort (generally a minute) with short rests in between, such as sprint training.

HIIT training is not usually considered part of CR. However, during the course we were told of a recent UK study* that



High Intensity Interval Training, such as 10 x 1-minute sprints on a static bike, with short rests in between, could benefit some people with stable CHD

has led to changes in CR exercise programmes at some centres. In the study, 382 carefully selected patients from six CR centres (including Ystrad Mynach) were assigned to receive either low-volume HIIT or standard MISS training twice a week over eight weeks. Both groups performed warm-ups and cool-downs.

The researchers found that patients doing the HIIT training (10 x 1-minute intervals of vigorous exercise) increased their cardiorespiratory fitness more than those doing the standard MISS training. They also found that the low-volume HIIT training was safe and well tolerated.

So, if low-volume HIIT has proven safe and effective at improving cardiovascular fitness, should all people who've had a cardiac event be doing it? Not necessarily; there are certain criteria, and it's not going to be everyone's cup of tea. But if you'd like to know more, please ask me, or your regular Cardiac Rehab Exercise Instructor.

*SOURCE: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36753063/>

IMAGE: Freepik(www.freepik.com)

Shining stars

For Christmas this year we tried something new, with our "Dedicate a Star" fundraiser. Kindly created for us by charity supporters Josephine Indge and Neil Stratton, this online fundraiser featured a virtual Christmas tree, and invited people to buy a festive star to decorate the tree and celebrate a loved one, or the benefits cardiac rehab can bring.

The result was a very colourful tree, spangled with red, gold, silver and white stars, with each star leading to an inspiring story or touching memory from the contributor. And there were some great photos, too! Thanks to your generosity, this new venture raised a sparkling £385 to help fund our work in the community!



Dates for the diary



2025 "Love Your Heart" Prize Draw

People were so generous in supporting our 2024 Summer Prize Draw that we decided to defer our usual Grand Christmas Draw and reinvent it as our 2025 "Love Your Heart" Prize Draw, to run from 18 January – 1 March 2025.

from Class Assistant Allen Cleveland, or call our Membership Secretary Kathy Cleveland on 01873 830 829.



Just make sure you return your completed ticket stubs and payment in the pre-addressed envelope by midday on Saturday 1 March, as the draw will take place at 6pm the same day. Here's wishing everyone the very best of luck!

Tickets cost £1 each, and prizes are as follows:

- 1st prize: £300
- 2nd prize: £150
- 3rd prize: £75

If you're a member, you'll have received two books of tickets (10 tickets) with this newsletter. Additional tickets are available



Fancy a flutter? Join our 200+ Club today!

The 1st of March is, of course, St David's Day. But did you know it's also the annual renewal date for our 200+ Club fundraising lottery?

✓ Club members pay an annual fee of £20 per number, with renewals due on 1 March each year.

The prizes are currently set at:

- 1st prize: £100
- 2nd prize: £75
- 3rd prize: £50



This members-only lottery helps support our work and also gives you a chance to win a little extra cash. Here's how it works:

✓ Each club member buys a unique number that's used in our quarterly draws. These take place during the second week of March, June, September and December.

✓ You can buy more than 1 number, and you're welcome to choose specific numbers if they're still available.

New members are welcome and joining is easy: simply download an application form from our website:

cardiac-rehab.org.uk/200-club, or contact Owen Webber on 01494 718 824/owen155@btinternet.com



GREEN FINGERS AT THE READY!

Quiz answers (from p.2)

1. B – This is the NHS recommended daily target. Try to drink a bit more if you're very active, it's a hot day, or you are feeling unwell. Tea and coffee both count towards your target!
2. A. No – artificial sweeteners do not affect blood sugar levels; B. Yes – without fat to slow things down, any sugar in the yogurt will be quickly absorbed, and some fruit yogurts contain a lot of sugar!
3. Yes – the starch in potato crisps breaks down quickly into sugars, plus BBQ flavouring often contains added sugar. D. No – eating a sweet treat straight after a meal of veg, protein and healthy fats is less likely to cause a sugar spike than if it's eaten between meals as a snack.
4. False: the nicotine in vapes raises your heart rate, against the goal of some heart medication.
5. All of these! The British Heart Foundation has found that people with moderate to severe gum disease have a 69% increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, which can lead to heart disease.

This year's Potato Growing Challenge will run from 15 March to 12 July, giving you just short of four months to produce a winning crop! A massive thank you to the Abergavenny Garden Centre for continuing to sponsor the challenge.

We'll have two classes as usual – Children (aged up to 16) and Adults (16+), with Garden Centre vouchers awarded to the top two heaviest harvests in each class as follows:

ADULTS

- 1st prize: £20 voucher
- 2nd prize: £15 voucher

CHILDREN

- 1st prize: £10 voucher
- 2nd prize: £5 voucher

Our potato growing kits (10L pots and potatoes) cost £5 each and will be available from Class Assistant Allen Cleveland. Or you can buy direct from our stall at the

Garden Centre on the weekends of 15-16 March and 22-23 March.

How you grow the potatoes is entirely up to you: you can use compost or soil, add your choice of fertiliser and choose to grow outside or under cover. Just make sure you use the supplied pot and potato, and just one potato per pot!

The weigh-in will take place at the Garden Centre on Saturday 12 July, when your pots will be emptied and the winning harvests revealed. Here's hoping for a warm start to spring, and plenty of sunny weather to get those spuds growing!

