

MOT YOUR HEART

The simplest way to give your pump the once over is to check into the nearest health clinic. You won't necessarily be tested by a censorious health bore. I had a check-up at the Adidas Wellness Centre (0161 930 2477) that was bordering on jovial, but they're used to dealing with the most stressed men in the country: football managers. They once wired up Sam Allardyce at a Bolton v Leicester match; his heart rate soared from 46 to 160 bpm, despite the fact that he was standing still. If you can't spare the time for, or fear the prospect of, a professional heart MOT, then try the following tests.

> **BODY COMPOSITION**

Fat is a sure sign of risk. Its presence is measured in three ways: BMI (a comparison of height to weight), fat percentage and waist-to-hip ratio. Obviously, the fatter we are the greater the risk but, as the waist/hip measurement reveals, the distribution is important because fat above the waist (men's beer guts) puts more strain on the heart than fat below (women's bums).

HOW TO TEST To work out your BMI, divide your weight in pounds by the square of your height in inches and multiply by 703 (a result of 20-25 is acceptable). The Tanita Body Fat Monitor (£45 from Argos) will measure your fat percentage (14-17 per cent is what you're aiming for).

ASSESS YOUR RISK To measure your waist-to-hip ratio, divide your waist measurement (navel height) by your hip measurement and check below:

Very low	less than 0.85
Low	0.85 to 0.89
Average	0.9
Above average	0.91 to 0.99
High	1 to 1.1
Very high	1.1+

> **BLOOD PRESSURE**

Blood pressure is expressed as systolic (the pressure on the artery walls after a beat) over diastolic (the pressure as the heart relaxes and fills). Hypertension, or high blood pressure, increases the chance of damage to the arteries.

HOW TO TEST You can ask for a test from your GP or buy a sensor on the high street; try the MediCare 200i from Argos (£80). Although blood pressure varies during the course of the day, a normal adult result is 100-140 for systolic and 65-85 for diastolic. →



MATTER OF THE HEART CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE IS THE BIGGEST KILLER IN THE UK – AND IT'S NOT JUST BECAUSE WE LIKE BEER. A FEW SIMPLE CHANGES ARE ALL IT TAKES TO SET YOUR TICKER BACK ON THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW **WORDS BEN WEBB**

FAT ISN'T A FEMININE ISSUE. A staggering 65 per cent of British adult men have a weight problem, and almost 20 per cent are clinically obese. If you want to join them, then just carry on doing what you're doing.

Your metabolism has been slowing down since you were 20 (at a rate of up to 0.2 per cent per year), so even if your lifestyle hasn't changed much throughout your twenties, your waistline will be expanding more quickly.

Fat may soon overtake smoking as Britain's biggest preventable killer. Diseases of the heart and circulatory system are the main cause of death in the UK, accounting for 235,000 deaths in 2000; 39 per cent of people die from cardiovascular disease (CVD), largely from heart disease and strokes.

Coronary heart disease (CHD) – the most common cause of death in the UK – is the one to look out for. Twenty-six per cent of premature male deaths are due to their ticker giving up. But a beer gut is just one risk factor. Each of us faces a complex interaction of risks such as

high blood pressure, stress at work, genes that cause high cholesterol and a weakness for filterless Gauloises.

To cut your risk of a heart attack, the solution is simple in theory: change your lifestyle. Jonathon Savill co-wrote a book called *No More Mr Fat Guy*, but he concedes that it could have been boiled down to just four words: run more, eat less. In fact, it's not even about eating less but eating differently. If you switch from full-fat to skimmed milk on your breakfast cereal, you could lose over 2kg in a year; change from Alpen Original to Coco Pops and (surprisingly) you'll be cutting your breakfast fat intake by more than two thirds.

But, apart from exercise and checking the small print on food packets, is there anything else? Well, you could try getting down on bended knee: according to one study, bachelors are three times more likely to die of a heart attack than married men. But whether or not that's on the cards, we tell you how to test your ticker (right), and overleaf we show how much you're at risk.

> **CARDIOVASCULAR FITNESS**

Your heart is a muscle: the more you use it, the stronger it gets. Regular aerobic training increases the cardiovascular system's efficiency, making a heart attack less likely.

HOW TO TEST The best way to measure your cardiovascular fitness is to measure your maximum oxygen uptake (VO₂) by doing a treadmill test. Getting an accurate measurement without using hi-tech equipment can be complicated, but the Adidas Wellness Centre recommends guidelines laid down by the *Health and Fitness Instructor's Handbook* (£40, Human Kinetics). They can be summarised as follows:

- 01** After doing a few warm-up exercises, time yourself as you walk one mile on a level surface as fast as you can (four times around a 400m track, plus 9 metres).
- 02** As soon as you've finished, record your time and your heart rate (bpm).
- 03** $VO_2 \text{ max} = 132.853 - (0.0769 \times \text{weight in pounds}) - (0.3877 \times \text{age in years}) + 6.315$ (for men only) - $(3.2649 \times \text{time in minutes}) - (0.1565 \times \text{heart rate in bpm})$. In the 30-55 age group, a score of 40+ is good and 35+ adequate (add five to all the scores if you're younger). A score of 30 is borderline, and anything under 25 means you need to work on your fitness levels. Exercise at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes at 65-70 per cent of your maximum heart rate (which is 220 - your age).

> **CHOLESTEROL**

The risk of CHD is directly related to blood cholesterol levels. Eighty per cent of the cholesterol in our blood is produced by the liver; the remaining 20 per cent comes from our diet. There are two types: bad cholesterol (LDL, or low-density lipoprotein), which clogs the arteries, and good cholesterol (HDL, or high-density lipoprotein), which returns its nasty relative to the liver. It's the ratio that matters, and an acceptable level is less than 5:1.

HOW TO TEST Buy a kit from a chemist and check your score (measured in millimoles per litre of blood) against the chart below:

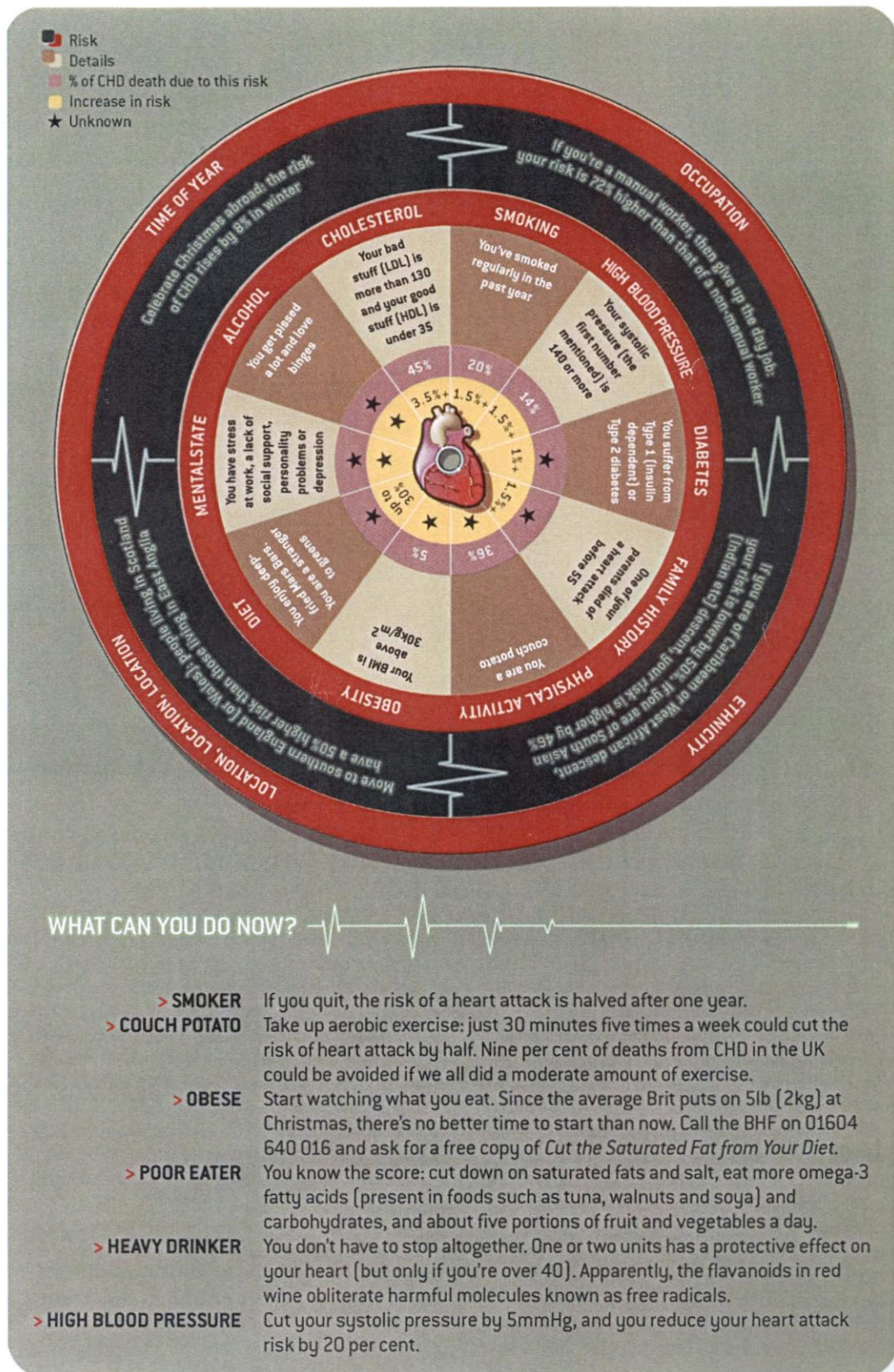
TOTAL CHOLESTEROL	
Desirable	less than 5.2
Borderline	5.3-6.2
High	6.2+

HDL	
Ideal	1.4+
Acceptable	1.1-1.3
Low	0.9-1
Very low	less than 0.9

THE HEART-ATTACK PREDICTOR

HOW DO YOU FANCY YOUR CHANCES? FIND OUT WITH OUR WHEEL OF (MIS)FORTUNE

Heart attacks are tricky to predict – that's why so many of us die of them. You really enter the danger zone at the age of about 45, though even then your actual, or "absolute", risk is still less than one per cent – unless you smoke, eat like a gutbucket, suffer from high cholesterol or display other risk factors. These factors are displayed in handy diagram form on the wheel of fortune (or misfortune) below, which summarises your increased chance of suffering an acute coronary event. The statistics come from the Prospective Cardiovascular Münster (PROCAM) study in Germany, and from research by the British Heart Foundation.



WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

- > **SMOKER** If you quit, the risk of a heart attack is halved after one year.
- > **COUCH POTATO** Take up aerobic exercise: just 30 minutes five times a week could cut the risk of heart attack by half. Nine per cent of deaths from CHD in the UK could be avoided if we all did a moderate amount of exercise.
- > **OBES** Start watching what you eat. Since the average Brit puts on 5lb (2kg) at Christmas, there's no better time to start than now. Call the BHF on 01604 640 016 and ask for a free copy of *Cut the Saturated Fat from Your Diet*.
- > **POOR EATER** You know the score: cut down on saturated fats and salt, eat more omega-3 fatty acids (present in foods such as tuna, walnuts and soya) and carbohydrates, and about five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- > **HEAVY DRINKER** You don't have to stop altogether. One or two units has a protective effect on your heart (but only if you're over 40). Apparently, the flavanoids in red wine obliterate harmful molecules known as free radicals.
- > **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE** Cut your systolic pressure by 5mmHg, and you reduce your heart attack risk by 20 per cent.