

What do I need to do?

today

this week

this month

this year

The Price (2008) 4ME vascular health Cue Card

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today

What do I need to do?

- * Take your medication as prescribed.
- * Try to eat a well balanced diet that is low in fat, salt and sugar and contains five portions of fruit and vegetables daily.
- * Attempt mental activity.
- * Give up or try to give up smoking.

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this week

What do I need to do?

- * Complete 30 minutes of physical exercise on five different days this week.
- * Make sure Alcohol consumption is in moderation.
- * Be aware of any changes to your mood and sleep pattern.

3

this month

What do I need to do?

- * Check my weight.
- * Keep a note of regular appointments.

4

this year

What do I need to do?

- * Visit GP for an annual health check.
- * Have a review of all your medication.
- * Have an eye test and/or a hearing test.
- * Have a 'wellcheck'

Introduction

Vascular Dementia and Vascular Health

Vascular dementia is a type of dementia caused by problems with the supply of blood to the brain, the vascular system within the brain becomes damaged and oxygenated blood cannot reach the brain. If the brain is starved of oxygenated blood then cells within the brain become impaired and this leads to cognitive problems and dementia.

The brain needs a good supply of oxygenated blood to keep cells healthy and functioning properly and blood supply is delivered to the brain (and other organs within the body) by a network of arteries and blood vessels. Healthy blood vessels deliver oxygenated blood to the organs that need supply, for example the brain or the heart. Sometimes the network of arteries and blood vessels can become narrow, rigid or blocked, there may be leaks or damage and this impacts on the delivery of oxygenated blood to areas that require blood ultimately causing damage to the area that has not received oxygenated blood.

Vascular dementia occurs when blood supply to the brain has become impaired due to problems with the network of arteries and blood vessels. Symptoms may develop slowly or they may be more noticeable particularly if someone has had a stroke or a temporary interruption to the blood supply which can occur if someone has a transient ischaemic attack (TIA).

Specific conditions that affect the heart, arteries or blood circulation can increase the chances of an individual developing vascular dementia and that is why it is important for individuals to be aware of factors that can impact on and potentially improve their vascular health.

This booklet aims to provide information on what you can do on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis to improve your vascular health. Enclosed is a cue card that you can put up within your home to remind you of what you need to do and it is best if this is placed somewhere in the home that you frequently use, for example on the fridge door or above the kettle.

There is also in the back of this booklet a list of contact numbers of services and agencies that can offer you any further advice and information.

What do I need to do?

* Take your medication as prescribed

It is important to take your medication as prescribed by your medical practitioner. Understand the instructions for taking the medication. If you forget to take the medication you are prescribed do not 'double up' on doses, ask a carer to prompt you if you regularly forget or speak to your pharmacist about dosette boxes or technology that can provide daily reminders to take medication. If you are unhappy about your medication or feel you are experiencing side effects DO NOT just stop taking it, speak to a medical practitioner first.

* Try to eat a well balanced diet that is low in fat, salt and sugar and contains five portions of fruit and vegetables daily

A healthy and balanced diet is good for your vascular system. You can include; bread, cereals (including breakfast cereal), potatoes, fruit, vegetables, lean meat and fish, dairy products and small amounts of fat, salt and sugar. If you need any help or support with trying to eat a well balanced diet you can ask your GP for a referral to a dietician or at most major supermarkets there are information sheets about healthy eating. Don't forget the idea is to have a well balanced diet and not to deprive yourself of the things you may enjoy.

* Attempt mental activity

Watch your favourite quiz show on television and try to answer the questions, try the crossword in the paper or a number puzzle. It is important to keep mentally active as some research shows that mentally stimulating activities are associated with increasing protective effects to the brain, the evidence is not conclusive but it will do you no harm.

* Give up or try to give up smoking

Smoking has a significant effect on your vascular health and smoking is also a risk factor for, amongst other things, coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke, health conditions that also impact significantly on vascular and cognitive health. Smoking is highly addictive and for some people it is a way of managing stress or giving pleasure and they do not want to give up, whatever your view speak to your GP, practice nurse or pharmacist about giving up completely which is the ideal situation or if you don't feel able to do this you can speak to them about trying to reduce the amount you smoke daily.

If you smoke in your home the local fire service can visit to conduct a safety assessment and will provide smoke alarms (if you already have them they will check these) to keep you safe, the number for your local fire service is in the back of this booklet.

What do I need to do?

* Complete 30 minutes of physical exercise on five different days this week

Physical exercise is an excellent way of improving and maintaining vascular health, in addition to exercise having a positive impact on cognitive and mental health. Exercise does not necessarily mean a trip to the gym for a work out, exercise can take many forms for example, a walk round the block, gardening, housework, dancing, a round of golf, even getting off the bus a stop earlier and walking home is good exercise. It is important if you are not currently physically active to see your GP before commencing strenuous exercise or if you are thinking about joining an exercise group speak with the group leader first.

* Make sure Alcohol consumption is in moderation

We measure the alcohol content of a drink in units. For instance, a pint of typical-strength bitter contains just over two units, while a glass of wine can contain anything from around 1.5 to over three, depending on the size and strength.

Current medical evidence shows that men should not regularly drink more than three to four units a day and women not more than two to three. "Regularly" means drinking every day or most days of the week. Consistently drinking more than these amounts can risk damaging your health, with the danger increasing the longer you continue and the more you drink.

Drinking alcohol is linked to both anxiety and depression, Apart from affecting your mental health; consuming alcohol also may affect your memory and brain function. Soon after drinking alcohol, brain processes slow down. It is also worth checking with your GP or pharmacist if you do like to have a drink that there are no contraindications with any medication you currently take.

* Be aware of any changes to your mood and sleep pattern

Depression is increasingly common in the older person and can often co-exist in individuals that have problems with their memory. We can all experience days where we feel a bit 'fed up' but depression is different, individuals can feel sad, hopeless and unhappy for most of the time, they can feel disinterested in hobbies and activities that they may once have enjoyed, they can lose their appetite and also encounter difficulties with their sleep pattern.

Changes to your sleep pattern such as early morning waking with difficulty in getting back off to sleep or feeling tired at night but unable to get off to sleep can be for some people an indicator of an underlying health problem such as depression. Consider seeing your GP if this goes on for more than a week.

3

this month

What do I need to do?

* Check my weight

Weight loss is more common than weight gain in older people so it is helpful to keep an eye on your weight to make sure you are not losing or gaining too much. Obesity and being over weight are established risk factors for the development of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease and as such increase the risk of stroke and vascular dementia, however weight loss particularly if it is pronounced may be the due to an undetected health problem. If you have any concerns about your weight speak with your GP or practice nurse for advice and further assessment.

* Keep a note of regular appointments

It is easy to forget appointments if they are not written down in a central and familiar place, some people keep a diary and others have a calendar to keep a record of appointments. It is important to keep appointments particularly with health professionals and other practitioners such as chiropodists etc as they will be monitoring your health and making sure that you are okay.

* Visit GP for an annual health check

This is an opportunity for you to have a full physical check up and your GP practice have a responsibility to offer you a yearly review of your physical health and lifestyle. This examination should include a blood pressure check, a blood test to check for example, cholesterol levels, thyroid function, blood sugars, and a weight check in addition to a discussion about smoking, diet, exercise and sleep.

This is also a good opportunity for your GP to review your mental health and memory problems, if you have any concerns about your memory problems talk them through with your GP and they may refer you onto a specialist mental health team for further assessment and support if you have not already been referred.

* Have a review of all your medication

This can be done by either your GP at your annual health check or with your local pharmacist. Having a medication review ensures that the medication you are prescribed remains appropriate for you and is able to be managed, that the duration of treatment remains relevant and that doses are appropriate.

* Have an eye test and/or a hearing test

Having problems with vision or hearing increases vulnerability and can limit quality of life, the range and type of activity you can engage in, it can contribute to social isolation and for some can increase the risk of falls. Early detection and treatment may minimise or even prevent some serious problems developing.

* Have a 'wellcheck'

Local voluntary agencies such as Age Concern sometimes offer 'wellcheck' services that offer information to people about services that could be available to maintain and ideally improve quality of life. A well check potentially could offer you information about; benefits transport, shopping solutions, social opportunities, accident prevention and also aids and adaptations for the home. Having a 'wellcheck' at least once a year will ensure you have access to resources and entitlements that could potentially make life a little easier and better.

Useful Contact Numbers

Age Concern Stockport

0161 480 1211

Alzheimer's Society Stockport Branch

0161 483 4446

The British Heart Foundation

08450 70 80 70

The Stroke Association

0845 303 3100

NHS Direct

0845 46 47

Stockport Fire Service

0800 555 815

Stockport Social Services

0845 644 4314

Stockport dementia care training/Carers Group

0161 419 6016