

## HEART HEALTH

Dr Sara gives us some tips on how to look after your heart

## CHARITY NEWS

We'd like to tell you about two more of our recent grant recipients in Ireland; Irish Dogs for the Disabled and Diabetes Ireland



**Dr Sara Kayat**

Every issue, Dr Sara Kayat advises on topical health matters and provides relevant tips.



# Heart Health

Dr Sara Kayat



Although in small doses stress can help you rise to the challenge, it is also being increasingly recognised as a risk factor when it comes to heart disease. Similar to the “fight or flight” reaction, stress also causes the nervous system to send signals to the adrenal glands to release the hormone epinephrine, which puts you on edge and prepares you for what is coming.

However, if signs of stress and anxiety persist beyond the realm of just a fight or flight reaction, your adrenals begin releasing another hormone called cortisol. Despite the presence of this hormone being motivating during a stressful period, if cortisol levels don't fall back down, this can have a detrimental impact, causing both physical and emotional damage. This can lead to an increase in blood pressure and the amount of blood pumped out by the heart.

Another negative affect stemming from stress is that it can cause you to partake in unhealthy behaviours that can cause strain on the heart. These can include turning to comfort foods high in saturated fats and sugars, self medicating through alcohol and smoking, and not having the energy to exercise regularly. Sleep quality can also be impacted, which is also known as a risk factor for earlier mortality.

# Heart Health tips

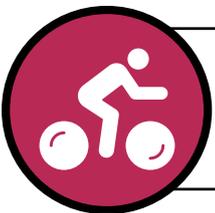
Besides identifying sources of stress and managing them through self-help methods as your first point of call, it is also important to be proactive to assist towards heart health. Refer to the ideas below for some inspiration.



## health checkups

Make sure you are visiting your doctor for health checks. These will allow for any risk factors that might contribute to an increased risk of heart disease to be picked up on, and hopefully put right before any damage is caused. Methods for checking heart health include blood tests for checking your cholesterol level and to screen for diabetes, as well as having your body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference measured. Privately, you may also have tracings and scans of the heart (ECG and Echocardiogram).

Keep in mind that the NHS also offers a health check every 5 years to those aged between 40 and 74.



## Exercise

Exercise is essential towards maintaining heart health. A sedentary lifestyle is one of the major risk factors for cardiovascular disease (the others include smoking, raised cholesterol, obesity and raised blood pressure), and regular exercise has a favourable effect on it. There are several ways in which exercise benefits your heart health, including how it reduces blood pressure improves cholesterol levels, reduces weight and increases sensitivity to insulin.



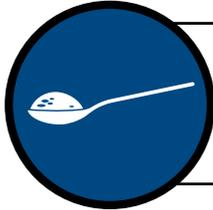
## 5 a day

A 2010 study found that eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day would prevent 15,000 early deaths in the UK; 7,000 from coronary heart disease, almost 5,000 from cancer and 3,000 from stroke.

In order to get a good variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet, try to remember to “eat the rainbow”. This will help you to get intake of fibre, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients.

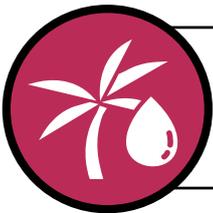
# Health

## Heart health tips



### Limit salt intake

Aim to keep your salt intake to 6g a day, which equals to a teaspoon. Bare in mind that most foods we buy already have salt added to them, where, in fact, this makes up three quarters of the total salt we eat. Keep an eye on this as it may mean that you have reached your daily salt quota without adding any to your food yourself. The reason salt should be limited is that it increases your blood pressure, in turn putting a strain on your heart.



### Limit saturated fats

Also mind your saturated fat intake. This type of fat is found in animal products and tropical oils, like coconuts and palm, and is found to increase heart disease risk factors such as increasing your LDL (low density lipoprotein).

LDL is often referred to as your “bad” cholesterol, and we are aware that the higher the presence of these particles, the greater the risk of heart disease.

Unsaturated fats, on the other hand, can be particularly healthy, and is why the mediteranean diet full of olive oil, seeds and avocados is deemed one of the healthiest, heart friendly ones we know of.



### Limit alcohol

Drinking more alcohol than recommended can lead to the increase of fats known as triglycerides in your body, which can build up in the artery walls, increasing your risk of a heart attack. Excessive drinking can also raise your blood pressure, cause irregular heart rhythms and lead to heart failure. It is suggested that you drink only within the recommended limits of 14 units a week.

You may have also heard that a glass of red wine is good for heart health, where the antioxidants like flavanoids in it are considered to be protective from the damaging effects of free radicals to the heart and blood vessels. It is much healthier, however, to get antioxidants from fruits and vegetables like blueberries and grapes.

# HSF health plan is here for you

Needing access to remote health and wellbeing advice? HSF health plan's virtual support system, HSF Assist, has recently increased the hours and availability of the virtual doctor and prescriptions service. Other benefits available include counselling, legal support and debt management. Register and login to [mypolicy.hsf.eu.com](https://mypolicy.hsf.eu.com) to gain access to these benefits which are available with your HSF health plan, or visit [hsfassist.ie](https://hsfassist.ie) for more information on offering this service to your workforce.



## Meet the Doctor

### Dr Sara Kayat

Each month, Dr Sara Kayat provides us with her latest health and wellbeing tips. Health Matters editions are launched along with an accompanying video, which you can find on the HSF health plan YouTube channel.

Dr Sara is This Morning's resident GP on ITV, regularly offering her expertise on their weekly "Second Opinion" feature.

She is a practising NHS GP at Gray's Inn Medical Practice, and is an advocate of maintaining good mental health.



Sara regularly practices mindfulness and yoga herself, and has a keen interest in preventative medicine.



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# Charity News

## Irish Dogs for the Disabled and Diabetes Ireland



*Our Group Chief Executive, Paul Jackson, with Irish Dogs for the Disabled CEO, Jennifer Dowler, the Lord Mayor of Cork, and Dick Spring, Patron of Recovery Haven Cancer Support House at our Cork Charity Reception in 2017.*

**At long last, we're nearing the tail-end of winter, and despite Jack Frost still being determined to stick around, it is safe to say that the countdown to the beginning of spring is well and truly on. Whilst we wait, we'd like to tell you about two more of our recent grant recipients in Ireland; Irish Dogs for the Disabled and Diabetes Ireland.**

Irish Dogs for the Disabled is a unique charity based in Cork, and is the only one of its kind in Europe. Since 2007, they have been providing assistance dogs to children and adults living with physical disabilities in Ireland, 80% of which are aged between 6 and 12 years.

Many of the individuals who seek assistance dogs have

disabilities that hinder their independence and social interaction. As a result, the charity's dogs are specifically trained to carry out a range of practical tasks towards enabling greater independence. These tasks include opening/closing doors, picking up dropped items, sending for help, and even helping children with severe walking disabilities to do so with greater ease and balance. Dependent on the individual's requirements, each dog is trained specifically to cater for these needs.

The experience of having an assistance dog not only helps partners in their day-to-day lives, but also has a lasting, "life changing" impact upon them. With the reliance that the dogs have upon partners to provide

for them in terms of exercise, feeding, love and care, it is encouraging for partners to take their assistance dog out for walks and engage with the public. As a result of this, partners often find a new sense of confidence and take up new activities, which might include returning to work or gaining further education.

At present, the charity delivers approximately 25 fully trained assistance dogs to their partners, and there is currently a waiting list of 80 people. Dogs are partnered at no extra cost to the recipient.

Dogs for the Disabled receives no government funding, relying completely on the generosity of sponsorship, donations and fundraising. The organisation

# Charity



HSF would lead towards training more assistance dogs to aid those living with Parkinson's. These dogs will be specifically trained to mitigate against the complications of the condition by interrupting the muscle spasms which can cause a freezing of gait, causing more accidental falls.

According to a survey done in Tallaght Hospital, Parkinson's disease is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease, which will affect 20,000 people in Ireland by 2046. There are currently approx. 12,000 people that suffer from Parkinson's disease in Ireland.

The Parkinson's Assistance Dog programme is in the early stages with a second dog currently being trained, but with positive outcomes, a real and global impact could be had upon the disease.

Irish Dogs for the Disabled ended up receiving a grant for €13,500.

The second charity we will cover in this issue is Diabetes Ireland. They are the only charity in Ireland dedicated to helping people with diabetes. On a patient level, the charity is dedicated to providing support, education and motivation to the 225,000 people from children to the elderly with the condition.

On a community level, Diabetes Ireland promotes public awareness of diabetes and its symptoms, as well as funding

operates on a budget of about €300,000 per year, with a team of 5 core staff and additional volunteers.

In the past few decades, the benefits of assistance and therapy dogs have become widely recognised as being beneficial towards an increasing number of health conditions. This has seen dogs being trained to assist those that have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, dementia, and most recently, Parkinson's.

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological disorder that primarily affects movement, causing erratic movements and gait freezing, causing falls and injury leading to potential further impairments.

Just before Christmas, we heard from Jennifer Dowler, the charity's CEO, who told us about their Pilot Parkinson Assistance Programme. This is being run in conjunction with University College Dublin,

The Mater Hospital and Neurological Institute Dublin. Working together with Professor Jim Lynch, Irish Dogs for the Disabled have provided Ireland's first assistance dog for a Parkinson's patient; Duncan Hughes.

Working with a broader team including physiotherapists and researchers from University College Dublin, there have been some positive results from the programme. It has been found that with the help of an assistance dog, that the patient's movements improved, their walking patterns became more consistent and their forward momentum was considerably aided. It is also worth noting that assistance dogs can be trained to respond to situations that leave people in vulnerable and worrying conditions, by as mentioned earlier, inspiring confidence and motivating people.

When talking to us, Jennifer mentioned how a grant from

# News

research into finding a cure.

Diabetes mellitus, commonly known as diabetes, is the most common form of the condition. It is a life-long illness caused by a lack or insufficiency of insulin, a vital substance made by the pancreas, responsible for letting sugar in. With diabetes, the pancreas makes too little insulin to enable the sugar in the blood to get into the muscle and other cells to produce energy. This results in a build-up of sugar into the bloodstream, and therefore high blood sugar levels.

Diabetes overtime can cause many health complications, blood vessel damage, nerve damage, circulation issues and a poor ability to heal. Patients are also increasingly prone to infection affecting the feet and lower limbs, which sadly often results in amputation. 63% of all lower limb amputations are diabetes related.

In 2019 in Ireland alone, 3,468 people were hospitalised for lower limb amputation or acute ulceration. It is estimated that 80% of these cases were preventable with correct and regular management, particularly when it comes to foot care.

Last month, we heard from Kieran O'Leary, Chief Executive of Diabetes Ireland. On the day, we discussed the charity's grant application for creating and refurbishing an extra podiatry room at their purpose-build Care Centre in Santry, Dublin, which



opened in 2013.

The Care Centre offers a range of services to the diabetes community, with 15,000 patients using it annually. 3,500 people go to the centre to access the podiatry service for diabetes foot management alone, and this is only increasing in demand with 13,000 new patients being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes annually (and growing).

Kieran explained that although the plan was always to expand the podiatry service due the increase of diabetes patients, the need to fast track this process has come about due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The past year has seen many local podiatry services close, therefore adding extra pressure to The Centre, resulting in the recruitment of a third podiatrist and the refurbishment of the flooring and equipment being pushed forward.

With the addition of another podiatrist, this will also enable Diabetes Ireland to provide more support and

education via online events and webinars. These began during lockdown and have proved to be enormously successful, hosting audiences of about 300 participants each time. They have been beneficial towards reaching and assisting many diabetes patients throughout the country, helping to prevent many of the problems that diabetes causes.

HSF ended up providing a grant of €13,500 to Diabetes Ireland.

To learn **more** about Irish Dogs for the Disabled, visit: [dogsfordisabled.ie/](https://dogsfordisabled.ie/)

To learn more about Diabetes Ireland, visit: [diabetes.ie/](https://diabetes.ie/)

## References

[diabetes.ie/about-us/what-is-diabetes/](https://diabetes.ie/about-us/what-is-diabetes/)

 [hsfcharity](https://www.facebook.com/hsfcharity)

 [hsfcharity](https://twitter.com/hsfcharity)

 [The Hospital Saturday Fund](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-hospital-saturday-fund)

 [hsfcharity](https://www.instagram.com/hsfcharity)



### Helping employees

With HSF health plan, your employees can receive hassle-free, affordable health cover for themselves and their families. Our plans also include access to HSF Assist<sup>®</sup>, our advice and support helpline service.

### Helping the community

Just by being a policyholder, you are making a contribution to the important work of our charity, The Hospital Saturday Fund. This is not something that usually happens when an insurance policy is taken out!

### HSF Health plan benefits



Dental



Optical



Hospital



Practitioner



GP consult /  
prescription



Personal  
accident



HSF  
Assist