

**T**he future for those people who may suffer from a heart-related illness is far more optimistic than it was even a few years ago. People are far more aware of the symptoms of a heart attack and stroke, which means they are more able to get medical help in time to save them. But of course there is no panacea. "Often the first time people know they have heart disease is when they die," says Dr Peter Mace, deputy medical director of Bupa Wellness.

Health screening programmes like the ones Bupa operates have grown in popularity as people have become more conscious of looking after their own health. There are several kinds of health assessments that vary from general health, which take in some aspects of screening for heart problems, to coronary health assessments, which are targeted only at heart health.

Dr Mace says: "Coronary heart disease is more common in men. Women are protected by oestrogen production until they hit the menopause at 50 or 60." He says that the biggest risk factor is age. "You can modify smoking, exercise and diet," he says.

A health assessment aims to individualise heart risk. For example it can highlight potential risk in an otherwise healthy-looking 40-year-old. "Forty is the age at which you can still stop it happening," says Mace. "You need to know

in advance what your risk might be. You need to know what the risk factors are and what to do to modify them."

For example, a health check could flag up high blood pressure, which you can control through diet and exercise. If you have a family history of heart problems you might want to look at your cholesterol levels, which can be controlled through statins.

"We try to guide people to the type of health assessment that is most suited to their age and health concerns," says Mace. For example, someone in their late 30s would be more likely to have a CT scan if one of their parents had a heart attack in their late 50s.

Health assessments take in fitness tests as well as tests for cholesterol and blood pressure. There is also a ques-

## PATIENTS FACE A BRIGHT FUTURE

### New health screening initiatives hold great hopes for the fight against heart disease



Matt Roberts is fit for life

### What everyone should know: checklist

#### You should know your:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol reading
- Whether you have diabetes
- Family history

#### For more information:

Bupa Coronary Health  
<http://wellness.bupa.co.uk/for-you/your-health-assessments/ha-coronary>  
[http://www.bupa.co.uk/health\\_information/](http://www.bupa.co.uk/health_information/)

tionnaire that evaluates risk factors such as family history.

"We are trying to give information about health now for the future," says Dr Mace. It is a strategy that has struck a chord. Bupa alone has experienced a rise in health screenings from 60,000 a year to 100,000 over a relatively short period of time. "Those who get a clean bill of health are less enthusiastic about coming back to us," points out Dr Mace.

At the other end of the spectrum are people who are not sure whether or not they have a heart condition. The challenge is finding those who do, and making sure they are monitored and treated.

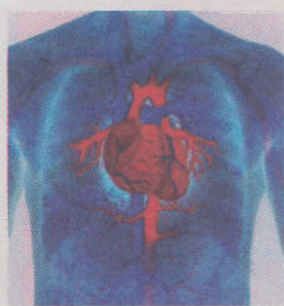
Dr Anthony Nathan who practises cardiology at The Wellington Hospital and Harley Street Clinic as well as the Royal London and St Bart's, specialises in heart rhythm problems. "Most people who have heart rhythm problems have palpitations and come to me saying their heartbeat is irregular," says Dr Nathan. "Some have faints or some have to be resuscitated from sudden death. When the heart goes out of rhythm that is a cardiac arrest."

He points out that only a small number of these issues are genetic. Some 10 per cent of hospital admissions are related to heart rhythm problems – a massive 1 per cent of total NHS spend. "I have to rapidly sort out the problem in terms of its risk," he says. The good news is most problems are treatable either with drugs or with ablation.

# Is your heart skipping a beat?

The majority of people have never heard of the heart condition arrhythmia, despite it being one of the top 10 causes for hospital attendance in the UK, according to a recent survey conducted by YouGov. 75% of people surveyed were also unaware that arrhythmia increases the risk of stroke and heart attack and results in 100,000 deaths every year in the UK, many of which might be prevented with better awareness of the condition, prompt diagnosis and treatment.

Arrhythmia is an umbrella term for a range of heart conditions where the heart beats too fast, too slowly or abnormally and affects over 700,000 people in the UK. There are several different types of arrhythmias and



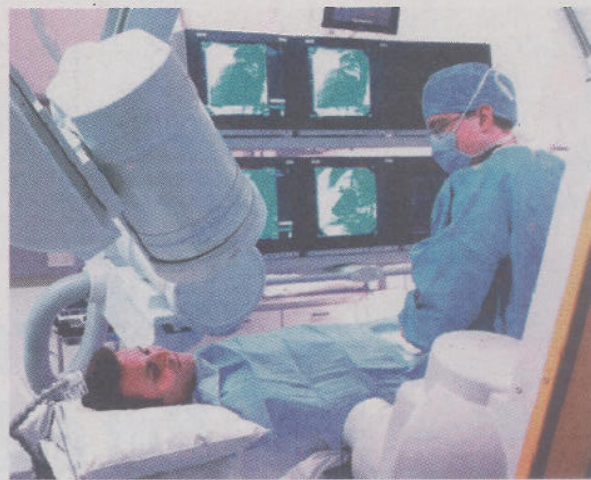
anyone can be affected. Atrial fibrillation (AF) however, is the most common, serious arrhythmia and typically affects people aged 65 years and older, although it is also seen in much younger people. An estimated 1 in every 20 people aged over 65 in the UK has AF and it affects men and women equally, with increasing age being a risk factor for development of the condition as well as its severity.

In some cases, there is no known cause of an arrhythmia however drinking, smoking and stress are all believed to play a part. Underlying conditions such as heart disease, thyroid conditions or heart valve problems can also cause an arrhythmia and for many people, a genetic factor is involved. Generally the symptoms, which typically include palpitations, vary in severity from person to person and can have a profound impact on a person's quality of life affecting everything from work to everyday activities.

A range of treatment options are available and the treatment used depends on the type and severity of the arrhythmia. Recent developments in minimal

access surgical techniques now offer a cure for some patients who have not responded to initial treatments, through a minor keyhole surgical procedure called catheter ablation. Other treatments include drug therapy, pacemakers, implantable cardioverter defibrillators, cardioversion and cardiac resynchronisation therapy which all help to restore the heart's normal heart rhythm.

These new surgical techniques are available at three private London Centres of Excellence – London Bridge Hospital, The Harley Street Clinic and The Wellington Hospital. The arrhythmia centres at these three hospitals are home to world class cardiologists specialising in



arrhythmias who together, have successfully treated over 10,000 patients.

'Arrhythmias can be easily treated but too often people are unaware of the condition and expect the warning signs such as palpitations or breathlessness to pass.

We urge people to attend regular check-ups, especially if a member of their family has suffered a heart problem in the past, to ensure accurate diagnosis and early treatment.' Dr Anthony Nathan, Consultant Cardiologist, The Wellington Hospital.

For further information about arrhythmia and the treatment services available at the specialist arrhythmia centres at London Bridge Hospital in South-East London, The Harley Street Clinic in the West-End of London and The Wellington Hospital in North-West London, please contact 08444 121 929 or visit [www.londonarrhythmianetwork.co.uk](http://www.londonarrhythmianetwork.co.uk)

  
London Bridge Hospital

THE HARLEY STREET CLINIC

  
The Wellington Hospital