

Lothian Heart Failure News



August 2009 Issue 16



Welcome to **Issue 16** of **Heart Failure News**, the newsletter for patients and carers in Lothian. We hope you'll find it interesting and informative and look forward to seeing you at the next **Forum Meeting** (please see dates below and reports on **Page 3**)

FORUM MEETINGS:

EDINBURGH (2009)

Monday 7th September 1pm-3pm

Monday 14th December 1pm-3pm

All meetings held in Room 7, Chancellor's Building, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh

Any queries to **Sandra Brown (0131 229 9985)** or **Janet Reid 0131 242 1863**

LIVINGSTON

Wednesday 16th September 1pm-3pm

Wednesday 9th December 1pm-3pm

All meetings held in the West Barn, Carmondean Community Education Centre, Livingston

Any queries to **Sandra Brown (0131 229 9985)** or **Diane Yellowlees (01506 523000)**

Forum Meetings are a great chance to meet other patients and carers living with Heart Failure and listen to informative talks which we hope are of relevance to you. Refreshments provided and enjoyment guaranteed! **No need to book. Please come along!**

Transport is available to and from our Forum Meetings. If you wish to arrange a lift, please contact **Sandra Brown (0131 229 9985)** by **Monday 31st August** at the latest. No bookings can be taken after this date.

Lothian Heart Failure News is brought to you by a partnership between Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland (CHSS) and the Lothian Heart Failure Network

Step Out for Scotland

CHSS AWARENESS WEEK

We're asking you to mark an important date in your diary – our annual **CHSS Awareness Week** – to be held in the first week of October.

We run the week to raise the profile of chest, heart and stroke illness in the community and to you an opportunity to support our services around Scotland.

This year we're marking an important birthday as it's **110 years** since CHSS was **founded** so we're inviting you to **Step Out for Scotland** to celebrate the event.

It's really easy to join in – you just have to be as active as possible, taking one step at a time towards general fitness or recovery from chest, heart or stroke illness.

Just how you do it is up to you!

perhaps you could

- ♥ **organise a walking event in your local park**
- ♥ **set a team challenge to row, run or cycle 110 kms**
- ♥ **promote a mammoth sponsored line dance for 110 friends and colleagues**

Our free **Step out for Scotland** pack is bursting with ideas and also contains a poster, a publications list and a copy of CHSS's 'Just Move' factsheet. To order a pack, just call **0844 588 6448**.

Celebrating 110 years of Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland

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PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT FOR HEART FAILURE SUPPORT SERVICE

The Scottish Government has this month published its **"Better Heart Disease and Stroke Care Action Plan"**. **Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland** was consulted on the contents of the plan and members of the organisation have been involved in the consultative meetings which have taken place during its preparation. MSPs were so impressed with what they learned about the **Forum Meetings, Volunteer Befriending Service and Newsletter** co-ordinated by CHSS' **Heart Failure Support Service** in Lothian and Lanarkshire that the Plan calls for the service to be rolled out across the country! Among the **"Recommendations for Action"** (listed on Pages 13–17 of the document), is the following: **"NHS Boards, through their cardiac MCNs, should work with Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland to replicate its heart failure support service initiatives across Scotland."**

The Action Plan can be obtained from the Scottish Government by calling **0131 556 8400** or can be consulted and downloaded online at **www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications**



Focus on Heart Failure Drugs

DIGOXIN



Digoxin, derived from the foxglove plant, **has 2 uses:**

- It is used for people with an irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia) known as **Atrial Fibrillation**. This is the **rapid, irregular beating of the heart muscle** that's present in some people with heart failure and also in some people without heart failure. If the heart beats too rapidly it can make you feel unwell with **dizziness or light-headedness and make you more breathless**. Digoxin tries to slow it down by preventing the heart from beating too rapidly.
- Digoxin can also be beneficial even if your heartbeat is normal as it **increases the force of the heart's contractions**. This can help relieve the symptoms of heart failure, especially if your symptoms are not responding to the ACE inhibitors, Beta-blockers or Diuretics. Even if you begin to feel well it is important you continue to take the **Digoxin**, to keep the heart working effectively.

For **Digoxin** to be effective, **you must take the right amount and have a blood test** to make sure the **Digoxin** level is correct. Once the level is correct it does not need to be re-checked unless you develop side effects.

Most common side effects:

If the levels are too high it can cause **loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting**. It can also cause your **heart rate to become too slow**, which can make you feel **dizzy or light-headed**. **Digoxin** can cause **visual disturbances, fatigue, headaches or confusion** in the elderly

Handy Tips:

- Make sure you have the level checked when starting on it (your doctor should arrange this). The blood test should be about 6-8 hours after taking the tablet.**
- Report side effects to your nurse or doctor.**



WARM WEATHER TIPS

Summer is here!! OK.....meant to be here!!!! The temperature has been warmer than most of us are used to and this can cause various problems for people with heart failure. Remember in heart failure, **your heart is not pumping as well as it should** and this can lead to problems with **breathlessness and fluid retention**. The medicines that you take are aimed at removing fluid from the body (**DIURETICS OR "WATER TABLETS"**) and also at strengthening the heart muscle (**DRUGS SUCH AS ACE INHIBITORS AND BETA BLOCKERS**).

Heat and humidity reduce the amount of water in the body and we all tend to **sweat more in summer** which can lead to dehydration. **HOWEVER**.....drinking too much fluid can lead to problems too, so for MOST people we ask you to stick to between 1.5litres and 2litres per day. Now this can be hard in summer when the temptation is to drink more as we get thirstier.

TOP TIPS

- Continue your usual exercise habits but move indoors to cool, air-conditioned spaces.
- Open doors and windows when possible to allow cool air through your home
- Avoid long car journeys in the mid -day heat
- Keep a good fan on hand at home.
- Be extra vigilant with your weight as losing too much weight can be a sign of dehydration and your diuretics may need adjusted. Contact your doctor or heart failure nurse for advice about this.
- Be cautious and take frequent cooling breaks if you must be outside.
- Flavouring ice cubes and using these to quench your thirst can be helpful and helps you stick to under 2litres of fluid per day as can ice poles (easily available from the frozen section in the supermarket)



HOLIDAY PLANNING



We all enjoy a nice break but a bit of careful planning can ensure your holiday leads to **relaxation and enjoyment**. Many people have concerns about flying. Short flights are not normally problematic as although modern airplanes are pressurised, provided your heart failure has been well controlled this should not lead to problems for you. **BUT** in general, consider the **STRESS** of the journey in relation to how you feel. If you have been unwell and your heart failure has been "unstable" then it may be best to take local trips.

Long haul flights enforce sitting for long periods, food that is usually high in salt and they can cause havoc with drug treatment such as diuretics. **Ask your doctor or nurse for advice.**

TOP TIPS

- Consider your destination carefully. If you tire easily and find walking up hills hard work then avoid a resort right at the top of a hill or a town that has lots of inclines/steps for example.
- If travelling overseas consider going slightly out of season to avoid the intense heat.
- Contact your holiday provider (airline, train company) prior to travel as they can arrange wheelchair transfers or assistance with luggage. **EARLY PLANNING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS.**
- Diuretic timing can be problematic when travelling, remember you can be flexible with this and take your normal dose on arrival.
- If travelling by aircraft allow plenty time to reach the gate. Distances can be deceiving! And remember you can always order a wheelchair or request a buggy ride.
- You can order special meals, e.g. low salt, diabetic.
- It is handy to write down a list of your medications with dosage and times and carry this with your medications in your hand luggage.
- If you have a pacemaker or defibrillator remember to take your device identity card, complete with date of implant, model, contact info and alert the security staff to obtain a hand search.

INSURANCE

Travel Insurance can be complex and expensive! It is very important to read all the small print such as **cancellation policy**, amount of **medical cover** and does your policy cover **repatriation to the UK** if you become unwell whilst overseas.

The general advice is **SHOP AROUND**. **Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland** issue a useful **factsheet** about this and can be ordered on line at www.chss.org.uk or calling the **Advice Line** on **0845 077 6000**.

WEST LOTHIAN HEART FAILURE FORUM

The last meeting was held on June 17th and was, as usual, a friendly and informal affair. The "action" centred around a practical massage session, in which participants were given the opportunity to experience a **relaxing head and hand massage**. Feedback was so positive from the first brave souls to try it out that even those who had been initially reluctant decided to give it a go—and thoroughly enjoyed it!

We also had an extremely engaging discussion about what participants considered to be areas for improvement within the NHS. **Out of hours care, admission procedures, car parking and waiting for medications on discharge from hospital** all came under scrutiny, as participants exchanged experiences and ideas for change.



If you live in West Lothian, please come along to our next meeting, which promises to be every bit as lively and welcoming as the last! See page 1 for details.

West Lothian Heart Failure Forum... A Patient's Perspective

In 1975 I stopped smoking, only to have my first Myocardial Infarction a year later in 1976. By 1982 I was in need of a Coronary Artery Bypass operation, and the doctors predicted a probable survival rate of 7 years.

Now 27 years later I have just celebrated my 84th birthday. My survival has been due to the cardiac specialists, good nursing care, constant surveillance by Diane, the Heart Failure Nurse, and last but by no means least, the help of a good wife.

The **Heart Failure Forum** is informative, friendly and a first class support for heart failure patients. We are lucky to have this facility available to us.

Dr. Ian. H. Thomson O. ST. J. MBCHB AFOM Royal College of Physicians (London)

(Sadly, Dr. Thomson died shortly after writing this article for the newsletter, however we are publishing it with the permission of his wife Jean.)

EDINBURGH HEART FAILURE FORUM

The last meeting, on June 15th, opened with a talk from Edinburgh Council's Planning and Commissioning Officer for Older People, who spoke about **the plan to improve day services for older people in the city of Edinburgh**. The council is committed to expand both **Day Centre Services and Opportunities outside of the home** and **Outreach Services**,



where older people would be supported on a **one-to-one basis to pursue their interests within their own homes**. Participants were asked to make a note of their own ideas for services they would like to see developed in their areas. More Day Centres, one-to-one visiting and support services, internet tuition at home, more support (small groups or one-to-one) for carers, one-to-one exercise sessions at home and a booklet containing relevant information on day services for older people all figured highly among the ideas expressed. Concern was also voiced about the privatisation of many services formerly provided by the local authority.

The second speaker was Suzanne Bell, **Lothian's Heart Failure Nurse** Educator, who talked about the **latest developments in the treatment of Heart Failure and care of those who live with the condition**. From the number of questions asked, it was clear that having



an expert so close at hand to address any concerns or queries was very much appreciated by those who attended the meeting!

Speakers at our September meeting (**see page 1 for details**) will be giving advice on sleeping problems and on benefits available for people living with long term conditions. **Please come and join us for what will certainly be a stimulating and enjoyable session!**

HEART VALVES EXPLAINED (Part Two)

SYMPTOMS OF VALVE DISEASE

Basically the narrower or more leaky the valve is, the greater the problem is likely to be. Some minor narrowing or leakiness may cause you no problems at all. However:

- ♥ **If the narrowing is severe -the heart has to pump harder to get blood past the narrowing.**
- ♥ **If the leakiness is severe - the heart has to pump harder to pump the blood that leaks back, in addition to the normal amount of blood flowing through the heart.**



In both cases, this can put a "strain" on the heart and lead to an increase in pressure behind the affected valve. This back pressure can cause blood and fluid to build up in the lungs or lower part of the body. This can result in:

Breathlessness, tiredness, dizziness or episodes of fainting, abnormal heart rhythms which can cause a feeling of palpitations, leg swelling, chest pain or angina.

Your doctor will listen to your heart sounds and may detect a "murmur" or abnormal heart sound and usually you will have an echocardiogram to look at how the heart valves are working.

WHAT CAUSES VALVE DISEASE?

The most common cause of valve problems is **RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE**. This is a general term for any heart problem which occurs after having an episode of **RHEUMATIC FEVER**.

Rheumatic fever is a condition which sometimes follows an infection with a bacterium called **STREPTOCOCCUS**. Your body makes antibodies to the bacterium to clear the infection. But, in some people the antibodies "attack" various parts of the body, in particular, the heart valves.

Rheumatic fever used to be common in the UK in the era before antibiotics but it is now rare.

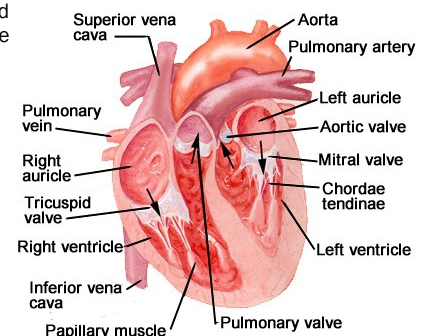
OTHER CAUSES

- ♥ **Deposits of calcium in parts of the valve. Common cause of AORTIC STENOSIS.**
- ♥ **A "FLOPPY" valve is a common cause of mild mitral valve regurgitation.**
- ♥ **Some congenital heart problems.**
- ♥ **An infection of the heart valve known as ENDOCARDITIS.**

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR HEART VALVE DISEASE?

If the narrowing or leakiness is mild and you have no symptoms then you usually do not need any regular treatment. If you develop symptoms or complications, various medicines may be prescribed for you. In some cases surgery may be discussed to stretch, repair or replace the valve but this may not be suitable for everyone.

PLEASE ASK YOUR GP, CARDIOLOGIST OR NURSE FOR ANY FURTHER INFORMATION



FINDING SOLUTIONS Grocery Deliveries

We all know that living with heart failure often means that getting out for the weekly or monthly grocery shop, isn't quite as easy as it might seem. Firstly we have to get to the supermarket or shop, then we have to push a heavy trolley or carry a heavy basket around the store, then, we have the problem of getting all those groceries home again. Therefore we have compiled a list of major supermarkets and other stores and shops who provide a **home delivery service**. Some of these services are free, and some will incur a small charge. Many of these services are available only on the **internet**, but some do provide an **instore service**. Whatever method you choose, this may be the first step to making grocery shopping easier for you, and remember, being able to get your groceries means that you are much more likely to have a balanced diet, and less likely to opt for more unhealthy options. For those of you who have a computer and don't know how to use it, it is never too late to learn, this can open up a whole new world of opportunities to make life that little bit easier. **Happy Shopping!!!!**



<u>Supermarket</u>	<u>Charges</u>	<u>Internet</u>	<u>In-Store</u>	<u>Website</u>
♥ Tesco	♥ Yes	♥ Yes	♥ No	♥ www.tesco.com
♥ Asda	♥ Yes	♥ Yes	♥ No	♥ www.asda.co.uk
♥ Sainsbury's	♥ Yes	♥ Yes	♥ No	♥ www.sainsburys.co.uk
♥ Somerfield	♥ Free if over £25	♥ No	♥ Yes	♥ www.somerfield.co.uk
♥ Waitrose	♥ No	♥ Yes	♥ No	♥ www.waitrosedeliver.com
♥ Iceland	♥ No	♥ No	♥ Yes	♥ www.iceland.co.uk

Energy Assistance Package

Are you finding that your home is cold, damp, draughty or generally hard to heat? Are you worried about your fuel bills? If you answer yes to any of these questions the **Energy Assistance Package** may be able to help you.



What is the Energy Assistance Package?

The **Energy Assistance Package** provides advice and support to enable you to maximise your income, reduce your fuel bills and make your home warmer and more comfortable. It offers a range of measures to help improve the energy efficiency of your home.

The new scheme is funded by the **Scottish Government** and is being delivered by the Energy Saving Scotland advice network in partnership with energy companies and other organisations.

To access all parts of the Energy Assistance Package, call the Energy Saving Scotland advice centre free of charge on **0800 512 012**.

When you call the advice centre, a trained advisor will take you through a series of questions about your home, including your current heating system. The questions will help the advisor give you the best energy advice possible and could lead to other forms of support including:

- ♥ Referral for tax credit/benefit checks
- ♥ Signposting to energy providers for social tariffs if eligible
- ♥ Loft and cavity wall insulation for those eligible
- ♥ Other measures to improve the energy efficiency of homes such as a new central heating system, if eligible

To find out how you can benefit from the **Energy Assistance Package** contact us on freephone **0800 512 012** or visit www.energyassistancepackage.com



RECIPE CORNER

Beef and Vegetable Casserole

Ingredients

Olive oil
 1 Onion, diced
 1 carrot, diced
 1 leek, diced
 2 celery sticks, diced
 2 garlic cloves, crushed
 75g mushrooms, sliced
 500g braising steaks, cubed
 2 tbsp plain flour
 3 sprigs of thyme
 Beef stock, fresh, cube or concentrate made up to 750ml
 2 tbsp tomato purée
 A dash of Worcestershire sauce



Method

Heat **1 tbsp olive oil** in a large pan then add the **onion, carrot, leek, celery and garlic**, and cook gently for 5 minutes, do not brown. Add the **mushrooms** and cook everything for a further 5 minutes then remove from the pan. Heat a little more **olive oil** in the pan, add the **beef** (in batches if necessary) and brown all over then stir the **flour** in well.

Return the vegetables to the pan and add the **thyme, stock, purée** and **Worcestershire sauce**. Season and mix well. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook covered for 1 1/2 hours until tender, stirring occasionally. Serve with **jacket potatoes, rice, pasta or mash**.

