

NHS 'health checks' reduce cardiovascular disease risk, new study finds

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Attending a health check as part of the England National Health Services "Health Check" programme is associated with increased risk management interventions and decreased risk factors for cardiovascular disease in the six years following the check. Credit: rawpixel, Pixabay

Attending a health check as part of the England National Health Services

"Health Check" programme is associated with increased risk management interventions and decreased risk factors for cardiovascular disease in the six years following the check, according to a new study published this week in *PLOS Medicine* by Samah Alageel of King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, and colleagues from King's College London, UK.

In 2009, the NHS introduced the Health Check programme, designed to provide checkups to adults in England aged 40-74 and spot early signs of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes or dementia. One review, however, found that the programme did not decrease morbidity or mortality among participants. In the new study, researchers studied data from 127,891 participants who completed the health check between 2010 and 2016, as well as data from 322,910 matched controls over six years' follow-up.

The authors found that health check participants had slightly lower baseline body mass index (BMI), blood pressure (SBP) and fewer were smokers (21% in health check participants vs. 27% in controls). Health check participants were five times more likely to receive weight management advice, three times more likely to receive smoking cessation advice, and their use of statins was 24% higher.

Six years after taking part in health checks, people who had a health check had net reductions in body mass index, systolic [blood pressure](#), and smoking status. The authors acknowledge that lack of randomization as well as [missing data](#) in [electronic medical records](#) could have introduced bias into the results.

"These results show that the NHS Health Check programme carries a potential for reducing cardiovascular risk through the early assessment and management of [risk factors](#). However, the programme could benefit from and should be supported with population-wide interventions to

improve its outcomes" comments lead author Samah Alageel.

"People who take up a health check may be healthier than controls but are more likely to receive risk factor interventions. Reductions in risk up to six years following a health check may be of public health importance but we need to be sure these benefits are shared by those most at risk" notes Professor Martin Gulliford, School of Population Health and Environmental Sciences, King's College London.

"While net changes in risk factor values were generally of small magnitude these were sustained for up to six years following the health check and the cumulative impact of these changes could be of public health importance across the population at risk," the authors say.

More information: Alageel S, Gulliford MC (2019) Health checks and cardiovascular risk factor values over six years' follow-up: Matched cohort study using electronic health records in England. *PLoS Med* 16(7): e1002863. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002863

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