

just a minute with...

Ahead of a general election this year, we asked the leaders of the three main political parties in the UK some questions about heart health

Gordon Brown, Prime Minister, Leader of the Labour Party, MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath

Heart and circulatory disease is still the UK's biggest killer. How do you plan to prevent it in the future?

I'm proud that premature deaths from coronary heart disease have halved since 1996.

Our brilliant doctors and nurses in the NHS can make a massive difference, but individuals need to take care of their health too. Soon everyone aged 40-74 will be entitled to a free health check on the NHS. There's also Change4Life, which raises awareness of diet and physical activity, and the NHS Stop Smoking Services, which provide one-to-one, group and medical support to anyone who wants to quit. In the last ten years, it has helped save more than 70,000 lives and helped half a million people give up for good.

How will you tackle existing health inequalities?

No one should suffer from health problems just because of where they live or their background. That's why improving the health and wellbeing of people from disadvantaged groups or poorer areas has been and remains one of my top priorities.

Last year we launched the most comprehensive programme ever put in place to address health inequalities, focusing particularly on infant mortality and life expectancy at birth. Meanwhile, we are making sure more health services are carried out in places such as pharmacies, community centres, supermarkets and football grounds, meaning

they can reach more people at times and locations convenient to them. Our Health Trainers programme also provides advice, motivation and practical support.

How will you ensure the UK remains a leader of medical research?

Britain's pioneering medical research is one of the things we can all be proud of. If we're going to beat cancer, for example, the cure's going to be found in some of the amazing work that's being done here. We're probably spending about £15 billion over ten years on medical research. We are determined to ensure that our National Institute for Health Research becomes the envy of the world.

How will you ensure that patients are involved in decision making?

The NHS has to change to meet the increasing demands and expectations of patients. They rightly want a service that suits their needs – including a say in the treatment regime they follow and where they're treated – and which reflects the same standards they are used to as consumers. So we are giving them enforceable guarantees and the chance through initiatives such as the NHS Choices website to comment

on and rate the service they get. We have developed initiatives such as Choose and Book, an electronic referral and booking system, and Information Prescriptions to help patients manage their condition. We also welcome initiatives such as the British Heart Foundation's Hearty Voices, which ensures people can have an influence on national policy and health schemes within their local area.

How do you look after your own heart health?

I run as much as I can in the park near Downing Street and on my running machine at home. Although it's not always easy, I try to eat as healthily as possible – I love fruit, especially bananas, but should probably eat more vegetables. Looking after our two young sons is a good way to keep in shape; whether it's having a kickabout or just lifting them and carrying them, as they seem to get heavier every day.

During National Heart Month we are encouraging people to leave a love note in BHF shops. Who would you write your love note to and why?

It would have to be Sarah, my wife. She's intelligent, strong, supportive and has transformed every day of my life from the moment that she's been in it. >