**Alström community webinar 05  
Top Tips for a Healthy Heart  
11th June 2020**

Dr Rick Steeds, Cardiac Consultant from the Alström Syndrome highly specialised clinical team from University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, gave his viewpoints as a cardiologist about a healthy heart.

**Q1. We try and eat healthy, but what are the best foods for a healthy heart?**

**10 points for a healthy diet:**

1. Reduce simple carbohydrates; avoid eating too much white bread, white rice, white pasta and potatoes. Try to make your diet varied and complicated to make your digestive system work for the nutrients.
2. Replace with brown/wholemeal bread, brown rice
3. Pasta use whole-wheat pasta or replace pasta completely with beans (baked beans contain lots of sugar and salt so use in moderation or use natural versions)
4. Nuts are good – Rick gave the example of a cashew nut curry. No salted, roasted nuts or additives such as extras like Cajun as they come with extra fats and salts. Walnuts and almonds have shown to reduce cardiovascular disease.
5. Meat try to choose un-processed, good quality low fat varieties. White meat is better for you than red meat. Restrict intake to once/twice per week. Have chicken without the skin or choose beef rather than pork and have leaner cuts. Think about cooking, don’t fry, use oven or griddle pan.
6. Cut down on processed food
7. Olive oil in general is good for you and reduces cardiovascular risk. Polyunsaturated oils are not so good

Avoid, mixed oils such as polyunsaturated or trans-fats

Rapeseed oil is good for cooking

1. Fruit and vegetables, we all generally don’t eat enough, with most people struggling to eat 5 portions per day. Reasons to increase your intake, most are slow release and un-processed, they contribute to a healthy balanced diet, increase vitamin intake and feeling of fullness, and increases fibre intake.
2. Seafood is good for you, try to have a minimum of 2 portions per week.  
   Oily fish, sardines, salmon, tuna etc. These are good as a meat replacement and can reduce cardiovascular risk.  
   Shellfish, prawns, not so good due to high cholesterol.   
   Recent research has shown, Omega 3 fish oils add value in a super concentrated version (may not be able to get on the high street). This has shown to reduce risk of cardiovascular problems.
3. Sugar, including sugary breakfast cereals and sugary drinks are very bad. These should be avoided and can give an excessive insulin release.

**Things to think about:**

Low fat and low sugar aren’t always good for you and are often mis-leading. Manufacturers often reduce the fat but add sugar or take out sugar and replace with salt – manufacturers use tricks to get us to buy these products.

Olive oil spreads and single fat spreads are good and much safer than butter. If you use butter, try to use as little as possible.

**Q2. With many services being closed, who should I contact if I am worried about my heart?**

**In an emergency**

If you are older 40+ and you develop central dull pain that makes you feel sick and sweaty and gets worst if you move about, then you should call 999 for an ambulance as this could be a heart attack.

This is more common in men who are 40+, are diabetic, have high blood pressure, high cholesterol and are overweight and don’t exercise.

If you have real concerns don’t hesitate to call an ambulance.

**If you are worried about your symptoms**

If you are worried about symptoms which have come on over a few weeks and are worried about your heart, request an appointment with your GP or call to seek their advice.

GP’s are doing appointments if necessary and using personal protection equipment.

If needed, GP’s can refer you for further guidance from Rick, and arrangements can be made if needed for further tests. Often these can be done locally.

You are more at risk of covid19 if you are in hospital or a care home. Therefore health professionals are very reluctant to bring you into hospital or do tests as the risks are high. Some patients with complex health conditions may still need to be seen in hospital and doctors will be able to talk through the risks with you. The clinicians from the AS multi-disciplinary clinics can work with local services if tests are needed.

**Q3. Is the Queen Elizabeth Hospital beginning to offer regular testing such as an echo to check the health of our hearts?**

Over the last 3 months, tele-medicine clinics have been introduced to check on patients. Before we went into lockdown, Tarek and Rick had started to discuss regular tests that AS patients currently have when they come to AS clinics. Test resulta over a number of years have shown that the rate of heart disease and fibrosis is much slower than first thought. Discussing are now taking place to explore the possibility of doing these tests less often (such as MRI scans being done every 3 years). No decision has been made yet and the team will consider individual circumstances.

**Q4. Government Guidelines have changed, is it safe to go outside?**

Sarah Steeds, Specialist Nurse from Queen Elizabeth Hospital gives current guidelines for those residing in England:

1. The amount of people who are classed as shielding is changing – but adults affected by Alström will remain classed in the clinically vulnerable category so should shield until the end of June
2. You can now go outside of the home but must follow strict social distancing guidelines and stay 2 metres apart from people. If you live alone this can be with another person but this should be the same person each time. If you do go out there must be no contact with others and you should stay 2 metres apart.

These guidelines are up for review again next week and regularly.

**Wearing of Masks** – need to be careful the mask is there to collect the virus. People tend to touch the mask and then touch their face. As soon as you touch the mask, you must wash your hands, and then change it.

**Q5. What are your top tips for a healthy heart?**

**Quick Top Tips:**

1. Exercise for 30 minutes 5 days a week
2. Keep your weight down
3. Avoid fatty foods
4. Don’t drink sugary drinks

Thank you to everyone who joined the session and particularly to Dr Rick Steeds and Sarah Steeds for discussing their top tips for a healthy heart and current shielding guidance.