What is a cardiac physiologist?

Cardiac physiologists are part of the Cardiology Department within a hospital. They help treat and diagnose patients with known or suspected heart conditions, by performing a range of investigations.

FAQs

Do you operate on hearts?

Whilst cardiac physiologists perform some small invasive procedures and support surgical procedures, they do not perform major heart surgery such as bypasses – these are performed by cardiologists.

Hardest part of the job?

As with many healthcare jobs, it is impossible to save everybody. This means you will inevitably see patients who are very unwell and may die during your career. Whilst this can be difficult to accept sometimes, there is a lot of support available within the department and the NHS to help you learn to cope with situations like this.

Favourite part of the job?

Cardiology is an incredibly rewarding area of healthcare to work in, as you can often see the impact of your work almost immediately. For example, many patients come in with severe symptoms such as crushing chest pain or extreme breathlessness and within hours of treatment in the department be feeling back to normal.

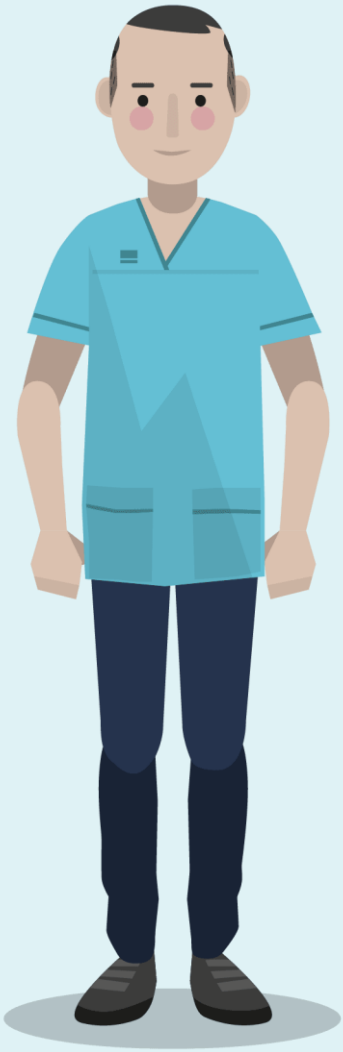
Can you die of a broken heart?

Technically you can die of a broken heart! Takotsubo is a heart condition where the heart muscle weakens following extreme emotional or physical stress meaning it cannot pump enough blood to supply the body. However, it is a fairly treatable condition and patients do not usually die from it.

What makes a good cardiac physiologist?

Good cardiac physiologists are:

- Interested in science and healthcare
- Caring towards other people
- Good communicators – a large part of the role involves putting patients at ease and explaining complicated medical concepts in a simple way
- Team players



CARDIAC PHYSIOLOGIST

More info

More information on becoming a cardiac physiologist:

https://www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk/careers/cardiac-physiologist

NHS SCOTLAND

What sort of tests do cardiac physiologists perform?

Some of the most common tests a cardiac physiologist is involved in are:

- Electrocardiograms (ECGs): provides information about the pathway of electricity through the heart – looks for abnormal heart rhythms
- Analysis of ECG monitoring devices: these can record ECG information from 24hrs up to several years!
- Exercise testing: some abnormal heart rhythms can only be seen during exercise
- Echocardiograms: an ultrasound scan of the heart (like during pregnancy) showing the structure and blood flow within the heart
- Cath lab: cardiac physiologists monitor the patient's ECG and blood pressure during procedures such as angioplasty (stent fitting), angiograms (injection of dye into the heart vessels to look for blockages) and valve replacement surgery

Routes into cardiac physiology

Useful school subjects: Sciences (particularly biology/human biology), Maths, English

Useful college courses: HNC or HND in Applied Sciences/ Applied Biological Science

Apprenticeships: start from level 2 (equivalent to National 5s)

Practitioner training programme (qualify with BSc): requires 2-3 highers

Undergraduate degree courses: Physiology, Cardiac Physiology, Clinical Science, Healthcare Science, Physiological Science, Anatomy & Physiology, Sports Medicine, Biomedical Sciences

NHS Scientist Training Programme: requires an undergraduate degree – fixed-term 3-year contract involving a part time MSc alongside full time work within a hospital