

HSRI COMMUNITY HEALTH SERIES



The
**Healthy Family
Handbook**

Practical Health Advice for Every Home

◆ **COMMUNITY EDITION** ◆



FREE COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Dr. Barilee Abueh Idemudia, OD, MD

Heart. Sight. Health. Hope.

HEART & SIGHT RESCUE INITIATIVE

The Healthy Family Handbook

Practical Health Advice for Every Home
COMMUNITY EDITION

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Founder, Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative

Community Health Series • Volume 1

Published by Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative (HSRI)

This handbook is distributed free of charge. Not for sale.

The Healthy Family Handbook

Practical Health Advice for Every Home

HSRI Community Health Series, Volume 1

Community Edition

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Published by Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative (HSRI)

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Medical content. The information in this book was current at publication in 2026 and is reviewed at least every two years. Guidance on screening, treatment, and medicines changes over time. Where anything here differs from the advice of the clinician caring for you, follow your clinician. Please read the Important Health Notice at the front of this book before you use it.

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Dedication

To God Almighty,

for His unfailing grace, wisdom, and faithfulness. Every opportunity, every lesson, and every life touched through this work is a testament to His goodness. May this book be used to bring healing, hope, and glory to His name.

In loving memory of my father,

whose integrity, resilience, and love for learning continue to guide my life and my work. Though you are no longer here, your legacy lives on in every life this mission touches.

And to my beloved family,

for your endless love, prayers, encouragement, and sacrifices throughout this journey.

Your health is your family's wealth.

Acknowledgements

To my husband, thank you for believing in every dream, standing beside me through every challenge, and reminding me that nothing is impossible with faith and perseverance.

To my children, Aliannah and Declan, you are my greatest blessings and my daily inspiration to build a healthier future for every child and every family.

To my dear mother and my siblings, thank you for your unwavering support, your constant encouragement, and for always believing in me, even before I believed in myself. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

To every volunteer, supporter, donor, healthcare professional, and community partner of the Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative, thank you for giving your time, talents, resources, and hearts in service to others. Your compassion has brought health, hope, and dignity to thousands of families. This book is a reflection of what we can accomplish together when we choose to serve with love.

And to every family who holds this book, may it empower you with knowledge, encourage healthy choices, and remind you that your health is one of your greatest blessings. It is my sincere hope that these pages help protect the people you love and inspire healthier communities for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Dr. Barilee Abueh Idemudia, OD, MD

Founder and Executive Director, Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative

Important Health Notice

Please read this page before you use this book.

This book is **health education**. It is not medical advice for you personally, and it does not replace examination, diagnosis, or treatment by a clinician who has assessed you in person.

Never start, stop, or change a medicine because of something you have read here. Speak first to the person who prescribed it.

Do not use this book to diagnose anyone. Two people with the same symptom can have very different illnesses.

If someone is seriously ill, go to a hospital or clinic straight away. Do not wait to finish reading.

GO NOW, OR CALL FOR EMERGENCY HELP, IF YOU SEE

- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the face, arm, or leg
- Sudden trouble speaking, seeing, or understanding
- Chest pain or tightness, with sweating, breathlessness, or pain in the arm, neck, or jaw
- Difficulty breathing
- Bleeding that will not stop
- A fit, or a person who cannot be woken
- A sudden severe headache unlike any before
- Sudden loss of vision, or severe eye pain

Chapter 3 explains these warning signs in full.

The author and Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative have worked to make this information accurate at the time of publication, and accept no liability for any loss or injury said to arise from its use. No book can know your circumstances. Your own clinician always comes first.

Welcome

Welcome to the Community Edition of The Healthy Family Handbook.

This handbook was created by the Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative (HSRI) to help families make simple, everyday choices that improve health and prevent disease. We hope you will read it, share it, and use it to build a healthier community.

This copy cost you nothing. It was paid for by someone who bought the Supporter's Edition of this same book so that your family could have one free.

Your health is your family's wealth.

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED, SHARE IT

If this handbook helps your family, please share the official download link with another family. One handbook can teach a whole community.

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED, SHARE IT

Share This Handbook

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www.heartandsightrescue.org

Share it by message, by email, or by showing someone the QR code on the back cover. Please send the link rather than an older copy of the file, so every family receives the most current edition.

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About Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative

Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative (HSRI) is a non-profit organization that brings free heart and eye care to families in underserved communities. Our teams provide blood pressure and blood sugar screening, vision checks, cataract surgery support, prescription glasses, health education, and referrals for ongoing care.

Since our founding, HSRI volunteers have screened more than 4,000 patients across Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi. This handbook was written so that the teaching does not end when the outreach team leaves. It belongs to your family now.



Registration at an HSRI community screening

- NIGERIA
- GHANA
- MALAWI

♥ 4,000+ PATIENTS SERVED

VISION SCREENING	BLOOD PRESSURE	BLOOD SUGAR
HEALTH EDUCATION	CATARACT SURGERIES	REFERRALS

A Message From Dr. Barilee

Before I became a medical doctor, I spent more than ten years as an optometrist, looking into people's eyes. The eye taught me something I have never forgotten: the body keeps quiet about many sicknesses until the damage is done. I met people who lost their sight to conditions that could have been treated, and people who lost loved ones to high blood pressure nobody had ever checked.

That is why this book exists. Most of the sickness that troubles our families can be prevented, delayed, or treated well if we catch it early. You do not need to be rich to protect your family. You need to know what to check, when to worry, and when to go to the hospital without waiting.

Read this book together as a family. Do the Family Challenges at the end of each chapter. Keep it where everyone can reach it. And when the day comes that this book helps you act quickly for someone you love, it will have done its work.

Your health is your family's wealth.

Dr. Barilee Abueh Idemudia, OD, MD • Founder, Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative

How To Use This Book

This book uses colours to guide you, even before you read a single word:

- **GREEN** headings teach.
- **RED** pages mean emergency. Learn them before you need them.
- **GOLD** boxes with ☐ checkboxes are **Family Challenges: small actions your family can take this week.**

You do not need to read the book in order. Start with any chapter that concerns your family today. The back pages have a Family Health Record where you can write down everyone's numbers.

10 Habits That Keep Families Healthy

Check BP ✓	Drink water ✓
Sleep under mosquito nets ✓	Eat fruits & vegetables ✓
Exercise most days ✓	Take medicines as prescribed ✓
Keep vaccines up to date ✓	Wash your hands ✓
Get regular eye exams ✓	Know emergency warning signs ✓

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PART 1

Start Here

- 1 · Your Health Is Your Family's Wealth
- 2 · Know Your Numbers
- 3 · When to Go to the Hospital Immediately

Your Health Is Your Family's Wealth



Families gathered at an HSRI community outreach

When one person in a family falls seriously ill, the whole family feels it. Money goes to hospital bills instead of school fees. Someone stops working to care for the sick person.

This is why prevention is not a luxury. Preventing sickness is almost always cheaper, easier, and kinder than treating it.

Many of the diseases in this book start quietly. High blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma, and kidney disease can grow for years without pain. By the time the body complains, damage has often been done. The good news: simple checks can catch them early, when they are easiest to treat.

This book will show you what to check, how to eat and move to stay strong, which warning signs mean go to the hospital now, and which common beliefs are myths that put families in danger.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Most heart attacks and strokes are linked to risks a family can change: blood pressure, blood sugar, smoking, food, and activity.

" PIDGIN CORNER

"Small check today better pass big wahala tomorrow."

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Sit together this week and choose your family health reminder person.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Ask 3 adults in your house when they last checked their blood pressure.
- ☐ Write down one health goal for the family this month.
- ☐ Choose one person to be the family health reminder.

Know Your Numbers



Recording results at an HSRI screening desk

Your body has numbers that tell the truth even when you feel fine. Learn them, check them, and write them down in the Family Health Record at the back of this book.

- Blood pressure (BP): how hard your blood pushes against your vessels. A healthy adult BP is usually around 120/80 mmHg. Ask the nurse to tell you your numbers.
- Blood sugar: how much sugar is in your blood. High sugar over time means diabetes.
- Weight and waist size: extra weight around the belly raises the risk of BP, diabetes, and heart disease.
- Cholesterol: a fat in the blood that can block vessels. Check it if testing is available.
- Eyes: vision checks for children and adults, and eye pressure checks for adults over 40.

You do not need to understand every number like a doctor. You only need to know your numbers and ask the clinic: is this normal for me, and when should I check again?

★ **DID YOU KNOW?**

You can check your blood pressure at many chemists and clinics in a few minutes, often for little or no cost.

“ **PIDGIN CORNER**

“Know your number, e fit save your life.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Check BP together as a family and write everyone’s numbers in the back of this book.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Check BP for every adult over 30 in your house.
- ☐ Write the numbers down with the date.
- ☐ Start a family health notebook, or use the record pages at the back of this book.

When to Go to the Hospital Immediately



GO TO HOSPITAL NOW

THIS IS A RED PAGE. Read it today. Teach it to your family before you ever need it.

Some sicknesses give you time. These do not. If you see any of the signs below, do not wait to see if it passes. Do not go to the chemist first. Go straight to the nearest hospital.

- Chest pain or heavy pressure in the chest
- Stroke signs: face drooping, arm weakness, speech difficulty
- Severe difficulty breathing
- Unconsciousness, person cannot wake up
- Seizure (convulsion) that does not stop
- Severe bleeding that does not stop with pressure
- Sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes
- Sudden severe weakness or confusion

★ DID YOU KNOW?

For stroke and heart attack, treatment works best in the first hours. Every minute saved protects brain and heart.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“If body dey show danger sign, no wait o, go hospital sharp sharp.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Practise the emergency plan together: who calls, who carries, which hospital.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Save the nearest hospital's number and location in your phone.
- ☐ Agree on an emergency transport plan: who will you call, day or night?
- ☐ Teach everyone in the house the FAST stroke signs (see Chapter 5).

PART 2

Heart and Blood Vessel Health

4 · High Blood Pressure

5 · Stroke

6 · Heart Attack

7 · Cholesterol and Blood Vessel Blockage

High Blood Pressure



A blood pressure check at an HSRI screening station

Know Your Blood Pressure Numbers

NORMAL

Around 120/80 mmHg or below

Keep your good habits going

WATCH ZONE

Higher than normal: 120-139/80-89 mmHg

Recheck within a few weeks. Reduce salt, stay active, and maintain a healthy weight

HIGH

140/90 mmHg or higher

See a clinician. May need medicine and regular follow-up

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing through your vessels. When it stays too high, it quietly damages the heart, brain, kidneys, and eyes. Doctors call it the silent killer because most people feel nothing at all until a stroke, heart attack, or kidney failure arrives.

Who is at risk? Anyone can develop high BP, but the risk rises with age, family history, too much salt, extra weight, alcohol, smoking, and little exercise.

How to prevent and control it: check your BP regularly, reduce salt and seasoning cubes, keep a healthy weight, and walk most days.

Limit alcohol, avoid smoking, and if you are given blood pressure medicine, take it every single day.

✗ MYTH: “BP medicine is only for when BP is high.”

✓ **TRUTH:** BP medicine works best when taken daily. It keeps the pressure controlled so damage never happens. Stopping when you feel fine is how strokes happen.

★ **QUICK TIP** Take your BP medicine at the same time every day. Tie it to a habit you never miss, like brushing your teeth.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Your BP stays high on two or more separate checks
- ✓ Severe headache, chest pain, or new vision changes
- ✓ Weakness or numbness on one side of the body, emergency

HSRI IN ACTION

At a screening day, a commercial driver in his forties came only to accompany his mother. His own reading was dangerously high, and he had never felt a single symptom. He started treatment that same week. Today he still drives, he still brings his mother, and now he brings his neighbours too.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

About 1 in 3 adults has high blood pressure, and many of them do not know it.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“BP no dey pain person, na why you must check am.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Go together for a BP check, everyone over 30.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

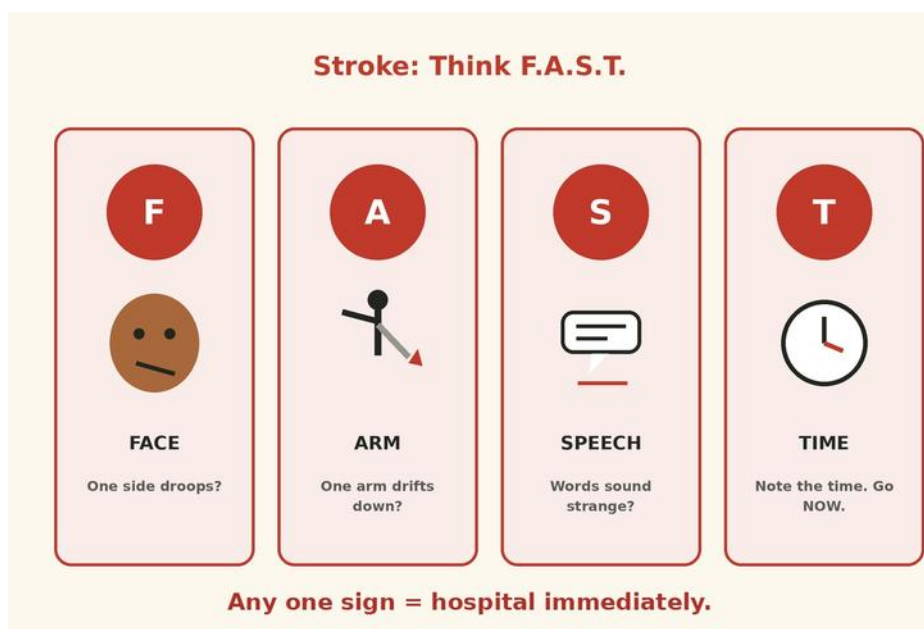
- ☐ Check the blood pressure of everyone over 30:
 - ☐ Father ☐ Mother ☐ Grandma ☐ Grandpa
 - ☐ Auntie ☐ Uncle ☐ Neighbour

Stroke

A stroke happens when blood stops reaching part of the brain. Every minute that passes, brain cells die. Stroke is not a spiritual attack and it is not ordinary tiredness. It is a medical emergency where speed decides how much of the person can be saved.

Remember FAST:

- F, Face: ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- A, Arm: ask them to raise both arms. Does one arm drift down?
- S, Speech: ask them to repeat a simple sentence. Is the speech slurred or strange?
- T, Time: if you see any of these signs, note the time it started and go to the hospital immediately.



High blood pressure, diabetes, and smoking all raise the risk of stroke. Controlling them is the best protection your family has.

★ **QUICK TIP** Know your nearest stroke-ready hospital before you ever need it, and tell the whole family.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Any FAST sign appears: face droop, arm weakness, strange speech, go NOW, do not observe at home
- ✓ Sudden severe headache unlike any before
- ✓ Sudden confusion or loss of balance

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Up to 8 in 10 strokes can be prevented by controlling blood pressure, blood sugar, and smoking.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Face, hand, talk, time. Any one bend, carry am go hospital now now.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Teach the FAST signs to each other until everyone can say them.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Teach the FAST signs to 3 people this week.
- ☐ Find out which nearby hospital can treat stroke.
- ☐ Check your own BP this week.

Heart Attack

Heart Attack Warning Signs

Chest pressure, like a heavy load

Sweating, nausea, weakness

Pain moving to arm, jaw, or back

Shortness of breath

Women, older adults, and people with diabetes may only feel unusual tiredness or breathlessness.

Do not treat chest pain at home. Go now.

A heart attack happens when blood stops reaching part of the heart muscle. The classic sign is chest pressure or pain, like something heavy sitting on the chest.

The pain may travel to the left arm, the jaw, or the back. There may be sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath.

Important: women, older adults, and people with diabetes may not feel the classic chest pain. They may feel unusual tiredness, breathlessness, stomach upset, or simply feel that something is very wrong.

What to do: go to the hospital immediately. Do not lie down at home to see if it passes. Do not treat chest pain with home remedies. Minutes matter, and hospitals can save heart muscle if you arrive quickly.

★ **QUICK TIP** Keep the emergency transport contact saved on every adult's phone, not just one.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Chest pressure or pain lasting more than a few minutes
- ✓ Chest discomfort with sweating, nausea, or breathlessness
- ✓ Unusual, crushing tiredness, especially in women, older adults, and people with diabetes

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Hospitals can open a blocked heart vessel and save heart muscle, but only if you arrive quickly.

" PIDGIN CORNER

"Chest pain no be something wey person dey manage for house."

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Agree together, out loud: chest pain is never treated at home.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Ask the adults in your family if anyone has ever had chest pain, and encourage a check-up.
- ☐ Save your emergency transport contact where everyone can find it.
- ☐ Agree as a family: chest pain is never treated at home.

Cholesterol and Blood Vessel Blockage

Fried and fatty food → harmful cholesterol rises → vessel narrows → heart attack or stroke

High cholesterol has no symptoms. Testing is the only way to know your level

Cholesterol is a fat that travels in the blood. Some of it is needed by the body, but when there is too much of the harmful type, it sticks to the walls of blood vessels like dirt inside a pipe. Slowly, the vessel narrows. If it blocks completely, the result is a heart attack or stroke.

What raises cholesterol? Fried and fatty foods, little exercise, extra weight, and for some people, family history. Because of family history, even slim people can have high cholesterol. That is why testing matters when it is available, and why some people need daily medicine even when they eat well.

What lowers it? Less fried food, more beans and vegetables, more fish, regular walking, and taking prescribed medicine faithfully.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Even slim people can have high cholesterol. Family history matters as much as food.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Too much fry-fry dey block road for blood.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

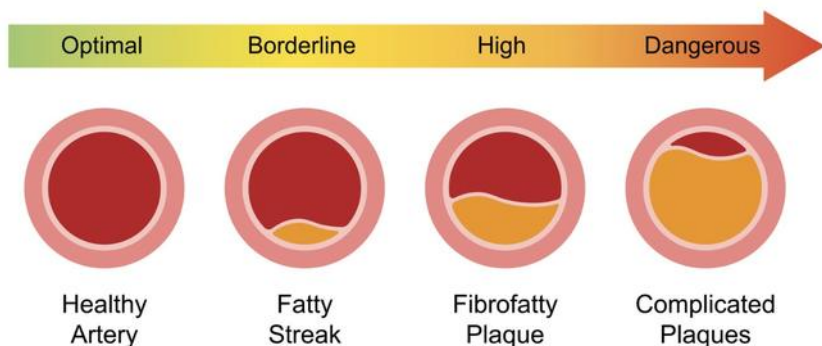
Cook one meal together this week that is boiled or grilled, not fried.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Reduce fried foods this week, boil, grill, or steam instead.
- ☐ Add one fruit or vegetable to your meals every day.
- ☐ Walk 30 minutes at least 3 times this week.

How a Blockage Builds Up

Cholesterol does not block a blood vessel overnight.



The bar shows the cholesterol level in the blood. The circles below show what that level slowly does to an artery over many years.

A healthy artery is wide and open, and blood moves through it freely. Fat begins to settle along the wall as a fatty streak. Over the years that streak thickens into plaque and the channel narrows. In the last stage the plaque can crack, a clot forms on it, and the vessel closes completely. That is what causes a heart attack or a stroke.

Look again at the first three pictures. Nothing hurts. Nothing shows. This is why the number matters long before you feel unwell, and why a cholesterol check is worth doing while you still feel perfectly well. Chapter 5 on stroke and Chapter 6 on heart attack describe what happens when one of these vessels finally closes.

PART 3

Diabetes and Kidney Health

8 · Diabetes

9 · Diabetes and the Eyes

10 · Kidney Disease

Diabetes



The only way to know your blood sugar is to test it

Diabetes means there is too much sugar in the blood because the body cannot use it properly. Over time, high sugar damages the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and heart. It is one of the fastest-growing diseases in our communities.

Possible warning signs: constant thirst, urinating very often, losing weight without trying, blurry vision, wounds that heal slowly, and tiredness.

But be careful: many people with diabetes feel completely normal for years. The only way to know is a blood sugar test.

Living well with diabetes: watch portion sizes, choose water over sugary drinks, stay active, and take medicine as prescribed. Diabetes that is controlled can allow a long, full life. Diabetes that is ignored quietly takes the eyes, the kidneys, and the legs.

★ **QUICK TIP** A fasting check, done in the morning before food, gives the most reliable sugar reading.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Constant thirst or urinating far more than usual
- ✓ Losing weight without trying
- ✓ Wounds that heal slowly, repeated infections, or blurry vision

★ DID YOU KNOW?

More than half of adults living with diabetes in Africa have not yet been diagnosed.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Sugar wey pass gauge dey spoil body small small.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Swap sugary drinks for water together for three days.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Check blood sugar if you are over 40, overweight, or diabetes runs in your family.
- ☐ Replace one sugary drink with water on 3 days this week.
- ☐ Learn one symptom of diabetes and teach it to someone.

Diabetes and the Eyes



An HSRI volunteer examines a young patient's eyes

There is a part of the eye you cannot see in the mirror: the retina, at the back, where seeing actually happens. Diabetes damages the small blood vessels of the retina little by little. This is called diabetic retinopathy, and here is the dangerous part: it usually causes no pain and no symptoms until the damage is far advanced.

As an eye doctor before I became a physician, I met many people who came in only when their vision was already failing, and the damage could not be fully reversed. Almost all of them said the same thing: but my eyes never pained me.

The rule is simple: if you have diabetes, your eyes must be examined every year, even when your vision feels perfect. Caught early, diabetic eye disease can be treated and sight can be saved.

★ **QUICK TIP** Book next year's eye exam on the same day you finish this year's, before you leave the clinic.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Any new floaters, dark patches, or shadows in your vision
- ✓ Any sudden change in how well you see
- ✓ Diabetes for 5+ years and no eye exam in the past year

★ **DID YOU KNOW?**

Diabetes is a leading cause of blindness in working-age adults, and yearly eye checks can prevent most of it.

“ **PIDGIN CORNER**

“Eye wey no dey pain fit still dey spoil. Go check am every year.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Book an eye check together for anyone in the house with diabetes.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ If anyone in the family has diabetes, schedule an eye check this year.
- ☐ Ask older relatives if their vision has changed.
- ☐ Do not wait for eye pain, damage can happen without it.

Kidney Disease



HSRI volunteers preparing medicines during a community outreach

Your two kidneys clean your blood day and night. High blood pressure and diabetes are their greatest enemies. Together they cause most kidney failure. Like the other silent diseases in this book, kidney disease often shows nothing early. Swollen legs, foamy urine, and deep tiredness usually appear late.

A special warning for our communities: painkillers like ibuprofen and diclofenac, taken every day for months, can injure the kidneys.

So can some herbal mixtures and unregulated tonics. Medicines that are not needed are not harmless.

Protect your kidneys by controlling BP and sugar, drinking water regularly, and avoiding daily painkillers or herbal mixtures unless a clinician has advised them. If you have BP or diabetes, ask for a simple kidney test (blood and urine) at your check-ups.

★ QUICK TIP Bring every medicine and herbal mixture you take to clinic visits, so anything harming the kidneys can be spotted.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Swelling of the legs, feet, or face
- ✓ Urine that is foamy, bloody, or much reduced
- ✓ You find yourself needing painkillers almost every day

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Your two kidneys filter around 150 litres of blood every single day.

“ PIDGIN CORNER

“No dey chop painkiller anyhow, kidney no get spare part.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Gather every medicine and herbal mixture in the house and review them together at the clinic.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ If you have BP or diabetes, ask your clinic for a kidney blood and urine test.
- ☐ Do not take ibuprofen or diclofenac daily without medical advice.
- ☐ Drink water regularly through the day.

PART 4

Food, Water, Exercise

- 11 · Healthy Eating Without Spending Too Much
- 12 · Salt, Maggi, and Seasoning Cubes
- 13 · Water and Sugary Drinks
- 14 · Exercise Without a Gym

Healthy Eating Without Spending Too Much



Free screening and health education during an HSRI market outreach

Healthy food does not mean foreign food or expensive food.

The healthiest foods in Nigeria are already in your market: beans, moi moi, okra soup, vegetable soup with plenty ugu or ewedu, fresh fish, garden eggs, and fruits in season.

The secret is not only what you eat but how much. Garri, rice, and plantain are not enemies. The problem is the mountain-sized portion. Fill half your plate with vegetables and beans, and keep the swallow or rice to a fist-sized portion.

Eat less of: fried foods, sugary drinks, and heavily processed snacks. Eat more of: beans, vegetables, fruits, and fish. Small changes, done every week, protect the heart more than any occasional big effort.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Beans are one of the cheapest protein foods in the market, and among the healthiest in the world.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Better food no mean big money. Na wetin dey market.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Shop the market together and fill half of every plate with vegetables and beans.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY: ADD VEGETABLES THIS WEEK**

- ☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday
☐ Friday ☐ Saturday ☐ Sunday

Salt, Maggi, and Seasoning Cubes

Too much salt pushes blood pressure up. And here is what many families do not realise: seasoning cubes are mostly salt. A pot seasoned with several cubes and salt is getting a double dose.

1 big seasoning cube $\approx$ half of a day's salt

Taste buds adjust to less salt within two to three weeks

The good news is that taste buds adjust. After two to three weeks of cooking with less salt, food tastes normal again, and the old level tastes too salty. Build flavour instead with onions, garlic, fresh pepper, ginger, crayfish, scent leaf, and local herbs.

✗ MYTH: “Food without plenty Maggi no get taste.”

✓ TRUTH: Flavour comes from fresh ingredients, not only from cubes. Your tongue adjusts within weeks, and your blood pressure will thank you.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Most of the salt we eat is hidden inside seasoning cubes, stock powders, and processed foods, not the salt shaker.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Reduce Maggi small small, your tongue go adjust, your BP go thank you.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Cook this week's soup together with half the usual cubes.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Use half your usual number of seasoning cubes this week.
- ☐ Taste food before adding salt at the table.
- ☐ Remove the salt container from the dining table.

Water and Sugary Drinks

About 8 cups a day

Make water the everyday drink of the house. Keep minerals (soft drinks) for special occasions

For everyday drinking, water beats everything. Soft drinks, sweetened juices, and energy drinks pour sugar into the body, and daily sugar raises the risk of diabetes and weight gain, especially in children.

You do not have to ban minerals (soft drinks) forever. Keep them for special occasions, and make water the everyday drink of the house. Children copy what adults do: if adults drink water, children learn to drink water.

Signs of dehydration to watch for, especially in children and older adults: dark urine, dry mouth, dizziness, and weakness. In hot weather and during illness, the body needs even more water.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

The human body is about 60 percent water. Even mild dehydration can cause headaches, tiredness, and poor concentration.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Water na the best mineral.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Do the 8 glasses challenge together on the same day.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY: DRINK 8 GLASSES OF WATER TODAY

- ☐ Glass 1 ☐ Glass 2 ☐ Glass 3 ☐ Glass 4
☐ Glass 5 ☐ Glass 6 ☐ Glass 7 ☐ Glass 8

Exercise Without a Gym

30 minutes

of movement, most days of the week. Walking, dancing, farming, fetching water, sweeping, all of it counts.

Exercise does not require a gym, special shoes, or money. Brisk walking counts. Dancing counts. Farming, fetching water, sweeping the compound, and climbing stairs all count. What matters is moving your body most days until your breathing gets faster.

Aim for about 30 minutes of movement most days of the week. If that sounds like too much, start with 10 minutes and grow from there. The best exercise is the one you will actually do, so choose something you enjoy: walk with a friend, dance to your favourite music, join in children's games.

Regular movement lowers blood pressure, controls sugar and weight, strengthens the heart, and lifts the mood. It is the cheapest medicine in this entire book.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Thirty minutes of brisk walking most days can lower blood pressure, blood sugar, and stress.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Waka well well, your heart go strong.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Take a 30 minute family walk this week.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY: WALK 30 MINUTES

- ☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday
☐ Friday ☐ Saturday ☐ Sunday

PART 5

Women, Men, and Children

15 · Women's Health

16 · Men's Health

17 · Children's Health

18 · Healthy Pregnancy

Women's Health

Women often care for everyone else first and themselves last. But a family's health usually stands on the health of its women. A few checks protect years of life:

Four checks that protect a woman's life

ANTENATAL CARE

FAMILY PLANNING

BREAST AWARENESS

CERVICAL SCREENING

- Antenatal care: every pregnant woman should register early at a clinic (see Chapter 18).
- Family planning: spacing children protects the health of both mother and babies. Modern methods are safe, and a clinic can help you choose.
- Breast awareness: know how your breasts normally feel. A new lump, skin change, or nipple discharge should be checked without delay.
- Cervical cancer screening: this cancer can be detected early and prevented. Ask your clinic about screening. It is one of the most life-saving tests a woman can do.
- Heavy bleeding: soaking through pads hourly, or bleeding with dizziness, needs urgent care.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Cervical cancer can be prevented. Screening finds changes years before cancer develops.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Woman wey dey care for everybody, make she care for herself too.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Encourage one woman you love to book her screening, and go with her.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Encourage one pregnant woman to start antenatal care early.
- ☐ Ask your clinic about cervical cancer screening.
- ☐ Learn the breast warning signs and share them with two women.

Men's Health



An HSRI health education session during a community outreach

In many families, men are the last to visit a clinic. Some see it as weakness, and some simply keep postponing. The result is that men often arrive at the hospital late, with disease that could have been caught years earlier.

- From age 40 (earlier if it runs in the family), men should check BP and blood sugar regularly.
- Prostate symptoms such as waking many times at night to urinate, a weak urine stream, or difficulty starting deserve a clinic visit, not silence.
- Erectile difficulty can be an early signal of blood vessel disease, diabetes, or BP. It is a health sign, not a shame.
- Mental health matters. Stress, heavy drinking, and silent worry damage the body. Talking to someone is strength, not weakness.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Men who attend regular check-ups catch problems years earlier and live longer, healthier lives.

" PIDGIN CORNER

"Real man dey check him health, e no be weakness."

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Sons and fathers: book your check-ups together this month.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Men over 40: check BP and blood sugar this month.
- ☐ Discuss any urinary symptoms with a clinician.
- ☐ Never ignore chest pain or sudden weakness, see the red pages.

Children's Health



Vision screening at a community school

Children cannot always explain what they feel, so parents must know what to watch. Three pillars protect a child: complete vaccines, good nutrition, and quick action when danger signs appear.

Vaccines are one of the safest, most powerful protections ever created. Keep the vaccine card safe and complete every dose.

For fever, give fluids and paracetamol as directed, and seek care if fever is high or lasting. For diarrhoea, the great danger is dehydration. Give ORS (oral rehydration solution) early and keep giving fluids.

How to Prepare ORS (for purging / diarrhoea)

1

**Boil or use clean water.
Let it cool. Measure 1
litre.**

2

**Pour in ONE full ORS
sachet. Stir until it
dissolves.**

3

**Give small sips often,
after every stool. Finish
within a day.**

If the child cannot drink, is very weak, or vomits everything, go to the hospital quickly.

No ORS sachet? Mix 1 litre of clean water with 6 level teaspoons of sugar and half a level teaspoon of salt.

Go to the hospital immediately if a child:

- Cannot drink or breastfeed
- Is very weak, drowsy, or difficult to wake
- Has convulsions
- Is breathing very fast or with difficulty
- Vomits everything
- Has blood in the stool

★ **DID YOU KNOW?**

ORS is one of the greatest life-savers in medicine. It has saved millions of children from diarrhoea deaths.

“ **PIDGIN CORNER**

“Pikin wey dey purge, give am ORS quick quick.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Check every child's vaccine card together this week.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Check each child's vaccine card this week and complete missing doses.
- ☐ Keep ORS sachets at home before you need them.
- ☐ Know the nearest clinic that treats children.

Healthy Pregnancy

A safe pregnancy is planned for, watched over, and delivered in the right place. Register for antenatal care as soon as pregnancy is confirmed, early visits catch problems while they are still small.

Every pregnant woman should know

HER BP NUMBERS

HER CLINIC

HER TRANSPORT PLAN

High blood pressure in pregnancy can be dangerous to mother and baby. When it comes with severe headache, vision changes, or swelling, it can be preeclampsia, a serious condition. Every pregnant woman should know her BP numbers.

Warning signs that need the hospital immediately: any bleeding, severe headache, blurred vision, severe belly pain, fever, the baby moving much less, or waters breaking early. And plan ahead: deliver in a health facility with skilled hands, and arrange transport before labour begins.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Most pregnancy emergencies give warning signs first. Knowing them protects two lives at once.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Belle woman suppose know her BP and her hospital road.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Write the delivery transport plan together on the Emergency Plan page.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Every pregnant woman in the family should know her BP.
- ☐ Attend all antenatal visits, mark them on a calendar.
- ☐ Write the delivery transport plan into the Emergency Plan page at the back.

PART 6

Eye Health

19 · Protecting Your Eyes

20 · Cataracts

21 · Glaucoma

Protecting Your Eyes



An HSRI volunteer teaching children how to protect their eyes

You get two eyes for a lifetime, and much of eye care is simply avoiding harm. The most important rule: never buy eye drops from hawkers or the roadside. Some contain steroids that can silently cause glaucoma and blindness. Only use drops prescribed for you.

Protect eyes from injury during farming, grinding, welding, and sports. A simple pair of protective glasses has saved many eyes. And watch the children: a child who squints, sits too close to the board, or struggles in school may simply not be seeing well. Children rarely complain, because they think everyone sees the way they do.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Most blindness in our communities is preventable or treatable when it is caught early.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“No buy eye drop for road, e fit blind person.”

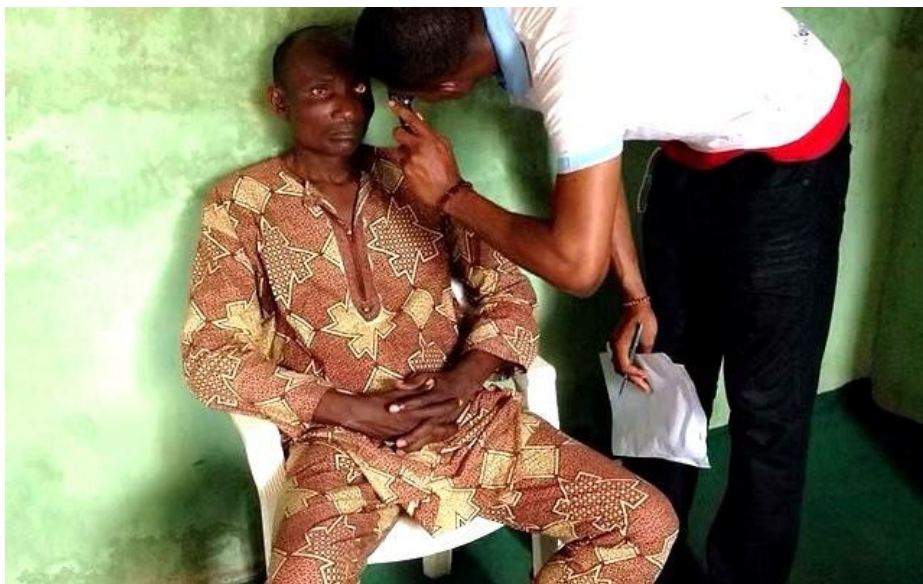
♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Ask every child at dinner if they can see the board clearly at school.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Ask each child if they can see the board clearly at school.
- ☐ Throw away any eye drops that were not prescribed for you.
- ☐ Use eye protection for grinding, welding, and farm work.

Cataracts



An eye examination during an HSRI outreach

Inside the eye is a clear lens, like a camera lens. With age, it can turn cloudy. That is a cataract. Vision becomes like looking through dirty glass or harmattan haze. Cataract is very common with ageing.

Here is the hopeful truth many families do not know: cataract blindness is usually reversible. A short surgery removes the cloudy lens and replaces it, and many people see clearly again the very next day.

HSRI has watched elders see their families' faces again after years of blindness.

Do not assume that a blind elder is simply old. Bring them for eye screening. What looks like the end may be treatable.

★ **QUICK TIP** Trouble with glare and night driving is often the first cataract sign people notice.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Vision that is cloudy, misty, or dimming over months
- ✓ Halos and glare around lights at night
- ✓ Sight that now limits daily activities, surgery may restore it

HSRI IN ACTION

One of our happiest memories is a grandmother who had not seen clearly for six years. The morning after her cataract surgery at one of the HSRI partner clinics, the bandage came off. She looked slowly around the room, and when asked which of the young women standing there was her granddaughter, she pointed straight at her.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Cataract surgery is one of the most common and most successful operations in the world.

“ PIDGIN CORNER

“Cataract no be curse, na operation dey clear am.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Visit an older relative together and ask about their vision.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Ask older relatives if their vision is cloudy or misty.
- ☐ Refer anyone with cloudy vision for eye screening.
- ☐ Share this truth: cataract blindness can often be reversed.

Glaucoma



Vision screening during an HSRI school outreach

Glaucoma damages the nerve that connects the eye to the brain, often because pressure inside the eye is too high. It is called the silent thief of sight because it steals vision from the edges inward, slowly and painlessly. By the time a person notices, the sight that is lost cannot be returned.

Glaucoma runs strongly in families, and it is especially common in people of African descent. If your parent or sibling has glaucoma, your own risk is high, and only an eye examination with pressure check can detect it early.

The rule: adults over 40 should have their eyes examined regularly, and anyone with glaucoma in the family should start even earlier. Treatment (drops, laser, or surgery) can protect the sight that remains, but only if the disease is found in time.

★ **QUICK TIP** Attach your yearly eye exam to a date you never forget, like a birthday.

WHEN TO SEE A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Glaucoma in a parent or sibling and you have never been examined
- ✓ Bumping into things at your sides, or missing objects at the edges
- ✓ Age 40+ and never had an eye pressure check

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Many people living with glaucoma do not know they have it, because the early stages have no symptoms.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“Glaucoma dey thief eye quietly. Check before e steal your own.”

♥ FAMILY CHALLENGE

Book eye pressure checks together for everyone over 40.

✓ TAKE ACTION TODAY

- ☐ Anyone with glaucoma in the family: book an eye exam.
- ☐ Adults over 40: have your eyes and eye pressure checked.
- ☐ Do not wait for pain, glaucoma has none.

PART 7

Common Infections

22 · Malaria, Typhoid, and Fever

23 · Hepatitis, HIV, and TB

Malaria, Typhoid, and Fever



Malaria remains one of the greatest dangers to young children

In our communities, almost every fever gets called malaria or typhoid, and treatment often starts without any test.

But fevers have many causes, and treating blindly wastes money, delays the real diagnosis, and breeds drug resistance. The modern rule is simple: test before you treat whenever testing is available.

Prevention remains the strongest medicine: sleep under insecticide-treated nets, clear stagnant water where mosquitoes breed, and drink safe water and wash hands to prevent typhoid.

Seek care urgently for: fever that persists beyond 2 to 3 days, fever with convulsions or confusion, a very weak child, or fever in pregnancy. And avoid taking repeated rounds of antibiotics for every fever, antibiotics do nothing against malaria and misuse makes them stop working when truly needed.



How to wash your hands properly, eight simple steps

★ **DID YOU KNOW?**

Sleeping under an insecticide-treated net every night is one of the most effective ways to prevent malaria.

“ **PIDGIN CORNER**

“Sleep under net every night, mosquito no go chop you.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Hang or repair the mosquito nets together this weekend.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Sleep under treated mosquito nets, every member, every night.
- ☐ Walk around the compound and remove stagnant water.
- ☐ Seek care (and ask for a test) for any persistent fever.

Hepatitis, HIV, and TB



Communities practising prevention together

Three infections every family should know about: Hepatitis B, HIV, and Tuberculosis (TB). Hepatitis B quietly damages the liver for years. HIV weakens the body's defences. Tuberculosis (TB) attacks the lungs and spreads through coughing.

All three share one truth: testing saves lives, because all three can be treated or controlled today.

A person on proper HIV treatment can live a long, full life and protect their partner. Hepatitis B has a vaccine, and children should receive it. TB is curable with a full course of free treatment. Any cough lasting more than 2 to 3 weeks needs evaluation.

Stigma is the deadliest complication of all three. Shame keeps people from testing, and hiding keeps disease spreading. A family that speaks openly and supports testing protects itself far better than a family that whispers.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Effective HIV treatment can make the virus undetectable, and a person with an undetectable virus cannot pass it to a partner.

“PIDGIN CORNER

“To test no be shame, na sense.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Talk openly as a family about testing, without shame.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Know your status, encourage testing without shame.
- ☐ Confirm children have received the hepatitis B vaccine.
- ☐ Anyone coughing beyond 2 to 3 weeks: go for evaluation.

PART 8

The Myth-Busting Chapter

24 · Health Myths We Need to Stop Believing

Health Myths We Need to Stop Believing

Every community has health beliefs passed down with love but not with evidence. Some are harmless. Others quietly cost lives.

Read these with your family, and read them with laughter where you can, because we have all believed at least one.

✗ MYTH: *“High BP na too much thinking.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Stress can affect BP, but high blood pressure is a medical condition. It needs checking, lifestyle changes, and sometimes daily medicine.

✗ MYTH: *“If I feel fine, I no need medicine.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** BP, diabetes, glaucoma, and kidney disease can damage the body silently for years. Feeling fine is not the same as being fine.

✗ MYTH: *“Stroke na spiritual attack.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Stroke is a medical emergency of the brain. Fast hospital care can save brain and life. Prayer and the hospital are not enemies, but the hospital must come fast.

✗ MYTH: *“Herbal medicine has no side effects.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Some herbs can damage the kidneys or liver, or clash with prescribed medicine. Natural does not automatically mean safe.

✗ MYTH: *“Cataract means old age blindness, nothing can be done.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Many cataracts can be removed with a short surgery, and sight is restored. Blindness from cataract is usually reversible.

✗ MYTH: *“Eye drops can cure every red eye.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Some drops, especially steroid drops bought anyhow, can worsen infections or cause glaucoma. Only use drops prescribed for you.

✗ MYTH: *“Diabetes means you can never eat normal food again.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Diabetes requires portion control, healthier choices, activity, and medication when needed, not a lifetime of punishment food.

✗ MYTH: *“Big stomach means enjoyment.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Belly fat raises the risk of diabetes, high BP, and heart disease. Real enjoyment is a body that stays strong for the people who love it.

✗ MYTH: *“Only rich people get heart disease.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** Heart disease touches every class, especially where BP, diabetes, smoking, and diet go unchecked. Prevention, thankfully, is nearly free.

✗ MYTH: *“Children don't need eye checks.”*

✓ **TRUTH:** A child with poor vision may struggle in school and never know how to explain it. Children assume everyone sees the way they do.

★ **DID YOU KNOW?**

Every myth in this chapter has cost someone their health somewhere. Sharing the truth is free.

“ **PIDGIN CORNER**

“No carry old story do your health. Ask, learn, check.”

♥ **FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Pick one myth together and officially retire it from your house today.

✓ **TAKE ACTION TODAY**

- ☐ Pick 3 myths your family believed and discuss them together.
- ☐ Share one truth from this chapter with a neighbour.
- ☐ Agree on one myth this family officially retires today.

Family Health Record

Write each person's numbers here after every check. Bring this book to clinic visits.

Name	BP	Sugar	Eye check	Date

Medication List

List every regular medicine in the house. Show this page to any doctor or nurse who treats you.

Medicine	Dose	Morning	Night	Why I take it

Our Family Emergency Plan

Fill this page today, before an emergency. In a crisis, nobody thinks clearly, this page will think for you.

Nearest hospital (name and location):

Emergency transport contact:

Family emergency contact:

Known illnesses in the family:

Allergies:

Blood group (if known):

Emergency Numbers

Fill this page in today, while everyone is well. In an emergency, nobody remembers a number.

Nearest hospital with an emergency unit _____

Nearest clinic or health centre _____

Emergency transport, ambulance, or driver _____

Our family doctor or nurse _____

Nearest eye clinic _____

Family member to call first _____

Second person to call _____

National emergency number where we live _____

NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Country	Number commonly used
Nigeria	112 national, 767 in Lagos
Ghana	112 national, 193 ambulance
Malawi	997 police, 998 ambulance
Canada and United States	911
United Kingdom	999 or 112

Emergency services change. Confirm the number for your own town with your clinic, then write it on the last line above and trust that one.

Know Your Numbers at a Glance

The same result is written differently in different countries. These sums help you read a result, not judge it. Ask the clinic what your own target is, and see Chapter 2.

Blood sugar

mmol/L is used in Canada and the United Kingdom. mg/dL is used in Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, and the United States. Multiply mmol/L by 18 to get mg/dL, or divide by 18 to go back.

mmol/L	mg/dL
3.9	70
5.6	100
7.0	126
11.1	200

Cholesterol

For total cholesterol, LDL, and HDL, multiply mmol/L by 38.7 to get mg/dL, or divide to go back. Triglycerides: multiply mmol/L by 88.6.

mmol/L	mg/dL
1.0	39
2.6	100
5.2	200

Blood pressure

Blood pressure is written the same way everywhere, in mmHg. A reading of 130 over 85 means the same thing in Lagos, Accra, Lilongwe, and Toronto.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

HSRI in Action

While this handbook includes illustrations, every photograph in this section comes from real HSRI community outreaches across Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi. These are the programs this handbook is part of.



Moments from HSRI outreaches: eye examinations, vision screening, classroom health education, blood pressure checks, and outreach days



An HSRI volunteer speaking with children during a community outreach



A health education session in a community school



Schoolchildren with their health education booklets



Students with their HSRI eye health leaflets

Join the Mission

This handbook reaches families through HSRI community outreaches. Support from friends of HSRI funds health education, vision screening, blood pressure and diabetes screening, cataract surgeries, and free handbooks like this one.



HSRI volunteers with children after a screening day

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Knowledge saves lives. Share this handbook. Teach one person what you have learned. Together we can build healthier families.

www.heartandsightrescue.org

Every family deserves clear, trustworthy health information.

Plain language for the things families actually need to know: blood pressure, diabetes, the warning signs of stroke and heart attack, eye health, and eating well without spending more.

This copy is free.

It was paid for by someone who bought the Supporter's Edition of this same book so that your family could have one at no cost. When you have finished with it, please pass it on to another family.

One Book. Two Lives.

Distributed free of charge by HSRI. Not for sale.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Barilee Abueh Idemudia is an optometrist, Internal Medicine physician, researcher, and humanitarian dedicated to improving health through prevention, education, and compassionate service. Her journey from optometry to medicine has shaped her belief that empowering people with knowledge is one of the most effective ways to prevent disease and build healthier communities.

She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Heart & Sight Rescue Initiative (HSRI), an international nonprofit committed to expanding access to health education, vision care, cardiovascular screening, and preventive healthcare in underserved communities. Through HSRI she has helped lead outreaches across Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi, providing screenings, prescription glasses, cataract surgeries, chronic disease education, and referrals for ongoing care.

She believes that knowledge saves lives, that healthy families build strong communities, and that quality health education should be accessible to everyone.

www.heartandsightrescue.org

