

# MALE HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

An initiative of the Irish Men's Sheds Association

## Men in the Workplace – Heart Health



Irish Heart  
Foundation

Funded by the Medtronic Foundation.

The first ever World Health Organisation (WHO) report on men's health and well-being which was published in 2018, found that too many men are dying young from preventable causes.

"The health and well-being of men in the WHO European Region: better health through a gender approach" which covers 53 countries of the WHO European Region, also found that while overall men were living healthier and longer lives than ever before, despite this progress, many of them die far too young from preventable causes.



**80% OF  
CARDIOVASCULAR  
DISEASES  
CAN BE  
PREVENTED**

The findings revealed that approximately 86 per cent of all men's deaths can be attributable to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries which hit men at a younger age.

Noncommunicable diseases also known as chronic diseases are those that are not passed on from person to person and tend to be long lasting. They include heart disease, asthma, diabetes and cancers.

The main causes of death for men aged 30–59 were cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes and respiratory illnesses. In some countries in the eastern part of the WHO Region, men's risk of dying prematurely from cardiovascular diseases was seven times greater than in the western part.

The good news is that 80 per cent of cardiovascular disease is preventable. Lifestyle measures such as stopping smoking, having a healthy diet and weight, checking for and treating diabetes, treating high blood pressure and cholesterol can all help.



## Cardiovascular disease

According to the Central Statistics Office, almost 9,000 people died from heart disease and stroke in 2018 and of these the 4,720 were male.

Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) is the term used to describe all diseases of the heart and circulation but most commonly it refers to heart disease such as angina and heart attack, stroke and other blood vessel diseases. Other conditions include congenital heart disease, heart valve disease and disease of the heart muscle.

Cardiovascular disease is one of the leading causes of death and disability in Ireland.

## Your heart, your motor

Our hearts move us. That's not a line from a Celine Dion song, it's fact. The heart is a muscle, and this muscle pumps the oxygen and nutrients in our blood around the body to feed all our organs and cells and carry back waste for removal. That blood fuels our muscles and those muscles move our bodies. So, yes, our hearts move us. Like any motor, the heart needs care. It needs to be fuelled properly and serviced regularly. Research has shown that men are less likely than women to be proactive about their own health but for the sake of your heart it's time to change that.

## When things go wrong

### Heart Attack

More men died from heart attack in 2018 compared to women with the data showing that it caused the death of 1,048 men compared to 692 women.

A heart attack happens when the build-up of fatty substance (atheroma or plaque) on the coronary artery wall tears or breaks and a clot forms in the artery, blocking the blood supply to the heart. The risk of this happening increases as you get older and if there is a history of heart disease in the family. The symptoms of a heart attack can be different for men and women. The most common symptom of a heart attack in men is chest pain. This is usually a crushing or tight pain, which may move to your jaw or your arms, particularly on the left side. You may also feel short of breath, sweaty or sick. You may feel light-headed or lose consciousness. You may become anxious or very afraid. However, 10 to 15 per cent of people who have a heart attack may not feel anything, they may just feel weak, tired or short of breath.

A heart attack is a **medical emergency** if you think you are having a heart attack call **999/112** immediately.





# Learn the difference between a heart attack and a cardiac arrest.

Many people use the terms “heart attack” and “cardiac arrest” interchangeably, incorrectly assuming they mean the same thing.

However, a heart attack and a cardiac arrest are two different but equally serious heart events, both of which require immediate medical attention.

A heart attack is caused by the coronary arteries, that supply blood to your heart muscle, suddenly becoming blocked. This blockage causes damage to your heart muscle. You might also hear of a heart attack called acute coronary syndrome or myocardial infarction (MI).

A cardiac arrest means there has been a sudden loss of function of the heart causing it to stop pumping blood around the body. This can occur in a person with or without heart disease. This happens due to a sudden disturbance in the heart’s rhythm which results in the heart not beating or beating too little to keep the person alive.

So, a heart attack is where the blood flow to the heart is stopped due to a blockage and a cardiac arrest is where the heart itself suddenly stops beating.

An easy way to remember this may be that a cardiac arrest happens when the heart stops or ‘arrests’, while a heart attack is when the heart is ‘under attack’ due to a blockage.

Listen to your body and remember to have regular medical check-ups to reduce your risk of a heart attack.

If you think you are having a heart attack, or you witness a cardiac arrest call 999/112 immediately.

## Stroke

### What is a stroke?

In 2018 in Ireland a total of 745 men died from stroke

A stroke is a ‘brain attack’ and occurs when a blood vessel, which is carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain, bursts or is blocked by a clot. This cuts off blood supply to part of the brain which can damage or destroy brain cells which, in turn, will affect how the body functions.

For example, if a stroke damages the part of the brain that controls limb movement, a person may not be able to move an arm or leg. Some strokes affect the base of the brain and can cause problems with eating, breathing and moving. A stroke can also affect mental processes such as how people feel, think, communicate or learn.

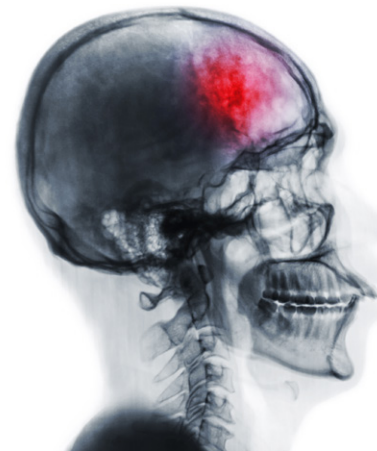
### Know the signs of stroke and act FAST

**FACE:** has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?

**ARMS:** Can they raise both arms and keep them there

**SPEECH:** Is their speech slurred?

**TIME TO CALL 999/112:** If you see any single one of these signs



## How to prevent your risk of a heart attack or stroke

There are a number of steps you can take to reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke, these include:

### Get to know your GP

Men in Ireland do not tend to visit their GP as often as women and are overall rather reluctant users of healthcare services. It is important to have regular check-ups with your GP and have your blood pressure, pulse and cholesterol checked. Don’t wait until it is too late.

### Know your blood pressure

A healthy blood pressure is a reading of 120 systolic over 80 diastolic or lower.

### Know your family history

Have your parents or close relatives had heart problems?

### Be active

Get out and do something that raises your pulse for at least 30 minutes, five days every week. You don’t have to run ten miles at Olympic pace, a brisk walk or easy jog will do the job, as long as it’s regular.

## Eat a Heart Healthy Diet

A heart healthy diet contains lots of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, pulses, oily fish, modest amounts of oils, low fat dairy, and lean meat or vegetarian protein sources and low intakes of foods high in fat, salt and sugar.

## Achieve and maintain a healthy weight

Be aware of your healthy range and try to stay within it.

## Stop smoking

A 2018 World Health Organisation (WHO) report on men's health and well-being, revealed that smoking was responsible for the death of 1 million men in 2016 in the European Region and ranks as the leading health risk factor among men in western and central Europe.

After one year of quitting the risk of sudden death from heart attack is cut almost in half.

## Easy on the booze

Try not to binge and keep under 17 standard drinks a week which should be spread out during the week.

## De-stress

Take time for yourself, your family and your friends.



## Why is blood pressure important?

It is estimated that more than half, or 64 per cent of people over 50 in Ireland have high blood pressure and 41 per cent of people living with high blood pressure are not taking adequate medication.

The 2015 Irish Heart Foundation Farmers Have Hearts study found that almost half of farmers screened had high blood pressure.

If your blood pressure is high it means your heart has to work extra hard to pump blood around your body. High blood pressure is a major risk for a heart attack or stroke. The only way to check your blood pressure is to have it measured by your doctor or a health professional. It's a straightforward test which only takes a minute, but it's important.

You may be unaware that your blood pressure is high because you feel well and look well.

High blood pressure has numerous causes. It can be hereditary and tends to increase with age. In many people it is exacerbated by consuming too much salt, by obesity or being overweight, inactivity, excess drinking and smoking.



Two measurements will tell you your blood pressure levels: systolic – when the heart squeezes the blood out of the heart into the arteries and diastolic - when the heart relaxes to let the blood flow back into the heart.

A healthy blood pressure is a reading of 120 systolic over 80 diastolic or lower.

If your blood pressure is borderline, that is a reading about 140 over 90, your GP will probably recommend you make some lifestyle changes and monitor the results.

These changes can include: Increasing your level of physical activity, losing weight, stopping smoking, eating more fruit and vegetables while cutting back on salt and processed foods, and cutting down the pints.

If you have a reading of 140 over 90 or above measured over regular checks by your GP, then your blood pressure is high and you may have to take medication, in addition to the lifestyle changes above, to lower your blood pressure.

See the 'Manage Your Blood Pressure' leaflet at [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

## Why is cholesterol important?

The 2015 Irish Heart Foundation Farmers Have Hearts study found that 46.1 per cent of farmers had raised cholesterol levels. Having high cholesterol levels in your blood is one of the risk factors which increases your chances of getting heart disease and stroke.

The body needs cholesterol to produce some hormones and to help digestion.

There are two main types of cholesterol – HDL cholesterol (high density lipoprotein) and LDL cholesterol (low density lipoprotein). HDL cholesterol is called good cholesterol, because it mops up cholesterol left behind in your arteries and carries it to your liver where it is broken down and passed out of your body.

LDL cholesterol travels from your liver through your arteries to other parts of your body. LDL is called bad cholesterol because it sticks to the walls in your arteries – making them narrow. This reduces the blood supply to your heart or brain. High levels of LDL cholesterol increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Problems occur when we eat too many fatty foods – mostly these are high in saturated or animal fats. Saturated fats increase cholesterol levels which clog up the arteries and can lead to heart attack and stroke.

High cholesterol can also be hereditary so check out your family history.

### Here are some tips for a healthy cholesterol:

- Eat a heart healthy balanced diet we discuss below
- Get in regular physical activity
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Keeping alcohol intake within the upper recommended limits
- Stopping smoking if you smoke

See the 'A Healthy Cholesterol' leaflet at [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)



## Be Active

Inactivity is a major risk for heart attack and stroke. Your body is designed to be active on a regular basis so move more, sit less.

### The Benefits

Getting regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to improve your overall health.

### Physical health

Being physically active can help reduce blood pressure, cholesterol levels and weight which can help to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

### Mental health

Regular exercise can help lift your mood, reduce stress levels and improve self-esteem.

### Social health

Exercise can be fun and social. Join a new class, team or group or simply get active with friends, family or colleagues.

## How much and how often

Aim to be active at a moderate intensity, for at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Include muscle strengthening activity 2-3 days a week.

The 2019 Healthy Ireland survey found that just 54 per cent of men in Ireland were meeting these recommended levels of physical activity

Your body uses heart rate, breathing and temperature to tell you when you are at moderate intensity. You will begin to feel warmer, be more aware of your heart beating and it will become a bit more difficult to talk.



Activities such as walking, running, swimming and cycling are great examples of moderate intensity activity. As you get fitter, you will need to increase the intensity of the activity to continue to reach moderate intensity.

Everyday muscle strengthening activities include carrying groceries or digging the garden. You could also include simple body weight exercises like squats and lunges.

## Tips to get active safely

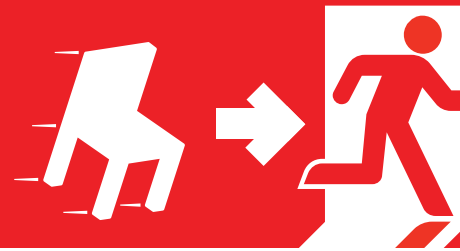
Don't overdo it - If you have been unwell or have been inactive for a long time, consult your GP before starting any activity programme and gradually increase the amount of activity you do. If you feel unwell, stop!

**Pick something you like** – Choose activities you enjoy and vary the activity you do.

**Make it social** – Get active with a friend, family member or colleague to keep motivated.

**Get active safely** – Warm up before exercise with some gentle movement and warm down after exercise with some stretching to prevent injury.

**Schedule** – Plan times for sport or activity into your weekly diary so it becomes a priority.



## Escape your chair

Even if you achieve at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity 5 days a week, sitting down for long periods of time can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

We spend more than half of our waking hours at work and for many of us that involves sitting down for most or all day. However, moving more during your working day can help you feel more alert, be more productive, reduce stress and can reduce feelings of fatigue.

### Tips to escape your chair at work

- Take the stairs instead of the lift.
- Set a reminder to stand up and move regularly.
- Stand up while taking phone calls.
- Walk over to a colleague instead of phoning or emailing.
- Use a bathroom further away.
- Take the opportunity to go out for a walk during your break.
- Have walking meetings.
- When travelling to work, get off public transport a stop early or park further away.



## Eat well

Healthy eating is about having a wide range of different foods.

The key to healthy eating is to eat a wide variety of foods by combining the right amounts of several different types of foods – from each of the main food groups on the Food Pyramid. This will help ensure that your body gets all the nutrients it needs while maintaining a healthy weight.

### It's also important to:

- Eat at least 5-7 portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Swap bad fats for good fats. This means choosing less butter, processed and red meats and full fat products and swapping for heart-healthy fats like nuts, rapeseed or olive oil and oily fish.
- Eat two portions of fish per week at least one being oily (e.g. salmon, mackerel, trout).
- Eat Less Salt. Instead of adding salt to foods, either in cooking or at the table, use herbs such as black pepper, paprika or garlic.
- Eat more fibre found in wholemeal flour, bread, oats and in plant foods such as fruits, vegetables and beans.
- Take a look at your diet as a whole and if high fat/ high sugar foods (e.g. sugar sweetened drinks, biscuits, cake, sweets, crisps) are featuring regularly think about how you can cut down.
- Drink alcohol within maximum recommended limits (if at all).



## Quit Smoking

### Kick the habit

According to the 2019 Healthy Ireland Survey, 19 per cent of men are current smokers compared to 16 per cent of women.

Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your heart

Through heart disease, stroke and lung cancer, smoking is one of the single greatest killers in the modern world.

One in two smokers will die young. Quitting smoking is the single most important thing you can do to live longer and there is plenty of support out there to help you make that step.

For more information see the Quit Smoking page on [www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)

## Watch your alcohol intake

The 2018 Healthy Ireland Survey found that Men (78%) are more likely than women (72%) to have drunk alcohol in the last 12 months and men are also more likely to binge drink (Defined as drinking six or more standard drinks on a drinking occasion).

### Drinking too much affects your heart and health

Alcohol is high in calories and therefore may contribute to weight gain it can also affect triglycerides – a type of fat in your blood.

Alcohol can increase blood pressure – a major risk for stroke while prolonged and excessive use can cause irreversible damage to our organs, particularly the liver.

The recommended maximum weekly limit for men is 17 standard drinks a week. 1 pint equals 2 standard drinks.

Remember, these are guidelines – not a target and drinks should be spaced out over the week, with two to three alcohol free days per week.

## Stress

Modern life can be stressful not least in the workplace, so it is important to manage your stress at work.

The link between stress, heart disease and stroke is complex and not fully understood. If you feel stressed, your blood will produce more hormones. Although they are useful in small amounts, too many of these hormones, continuously and over time, can damage your arteries and may lead to high blood pressure.

Over time if stress is not managed or resolved, it can lead to many other health issues including stomach problems; headaches; poor sleep patterns; neck and back pain and sexual difficulties.



Also, when life becomes pressurised, you may be more likely to smoke more cigarettes, drink more caffeine, drink too much alcohol and be less physically active. All of these can contribute to heart disease and stroke, as well as to other health problems.



The content within this booklet was written and provided by the **Irish Heart Foundation**.



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