

Male Minder

A guide to Men’s Health for An Post Staff

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The Author and the Publisher have taken care to ensure that the advice given in this booklet is current at the time of publication. The Reader is advised to read and understand the instructions and information material included with all medicines recommended, and to consider carefully the appropriateness of any treatments. The Author and the Publisher will have no liability for adverse results, inappropriate or excessive use of the remedies offered in this booklet or their level of effectiveness in individual cases. The Author and the Publisher do not intend that this booklet be used as a substitute for medical advice. Advice from a medical practitioner should always be sought for any symptom or illness.

Foreword

An Post and its Unions are delighted to be involved in the production of this booklet which promotes men's health. The idea to focus solely on men's health does not stem from any sexist intention, but rather from the simple fact that men are not as good as women at looking after their health. A wide body of research has found that:

- Men do not live as long as women.
- Men are less likely than women to attend their GP.
- Men spend more of their time in the workplace.
- Men develop more serious illnesses earlier than women.

These points were considered by Management and Union representatives as well as health professionals at a focus group facilitated by the Men's Health Forum of Ireland and formed the basis for the production of this booklet.

Taking early notice of the warning symptoms and following some simple steps to maintenance can go a long way towards feeling healthy. We urge you to read this booklet and hope that, as a result, you will be encouraged to take better care of your health, and indeed

that you will influence reluctant family members, friends or colleagues to do the same.

An Post has a fully resourced Occupational Health & Support (OHS) Service and all employees are encouraged to avail of the services offered and in particular, to support any Company health initiatives.

Our aim is that all our employees enjoy good health throughout their career in An Post and long into retirement. The booklet warns that 'Reading this could seriously improve your health' – please take heed!



Pat Knight, Human Resources Director, An Post



Steve Fitzpatrick, General Secretary, Communications Workers' Union – on behalf of An Post Group of Unions

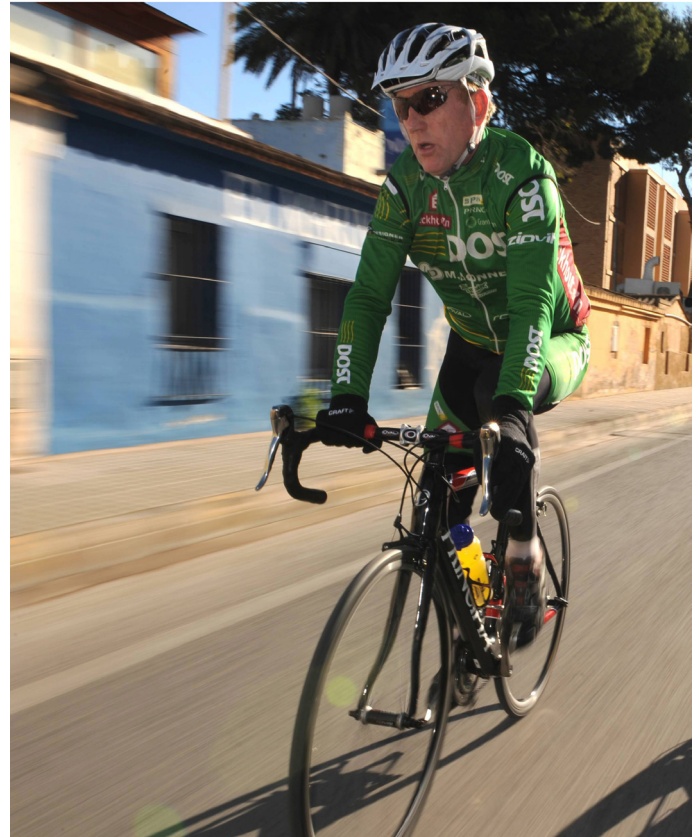
You may be asked to participate in a short follow-up paper survey. Please participate if you can. Your response will be anonymous and confidential.

A word from Sean Kelly, champion cyclist

My association with An Post through its cycling sponsorship has brought me in contact with many An Post staff all over the country. So I am delighted to endorse this booklet which encourages men in An Post to look after their health.

I know men who look after their cars and bicycles better than their own bodies – they know that maintenance results in better performance, but don't seem to apply that logic to their own 'machinery'. In my own case, I could not have had such a long and fruitful career as a competitive cyclist if I had not taken care of my health – though most people won't need to take as much exercise as I do!

Life is short. 'Looking after Number 1' helps us all to get more out of it, whether at work or at play. I hope that this booklet will make you think more about the importance of looking after your health. A little effort can bring huge gain.



Sean Kelly

Men at work



Getting it sorted

Men at Work – not just an Australian reggae-rock band from the 1980s – but a daily reality for most of us. Since the dawn of time it has been us guys who have hunted, gathered, dug and built. We’ve used our brawn – and even our brains – to provide for ourselves and our families. We work. It’s what we do.

Unfortunately we are also less likely to take care of our health than women. We don’t eat healthily enough, get enough exercise, take care to avoid back problems and manage stress, or pay enough attention to the amount we drink and smoke. And when health problems develop, we rarely see a GP about it.

However, all is not lost. Work is actually good for our health and a few changes in the way we approach our working day could do much to improve it.

This manual doesn’t pretend to be the absolute guide to better health, but it could make a difference if linked with common sense and better use of available health services and resources. Informed choices are always better than doing something simply because it sounded like a good idea at the time.



The stamp of healthy eating

Adopting a well-balanced diet not only improves your general health and well-being and helps maintain a healthy weight, but can also lower your blood cholesterol, keep your blood pressure down, and reduce your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. And there's no better place to start than with the first meal of the day.

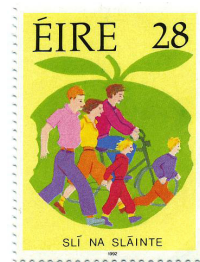
Breakfast

First of all, **do** actually have breakfast. You wouldn't expect your car to work without fuel, and your body is no different. Equally, you wouldn't put crude oil in your car, so take care over what you eat. That traditional fried breakfast may be tempting – and once in a while won't harm you – but did you know that a typical full Irish with bacon, sausages, fried egg, toast and a dollop of sauce is going to take up half your recommended daily intake of calories, almost all your total and saturated fat allowance, just about your entire salt intake and most of your daily protein as well?

If you like a cooked breakfast, why not try beans on toast, or scrambled eggs and mushrooms on toast – but make the toast wholemeal and grill rather than fry those mushrooms!

Or maybe try some of the following instead:

- A cereal with no added sugar, preferably wholegrain and low in salt. Perhaps try it with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk.
- Some fruit.
- A couple of slices of wholemeal toast with margarine (or at least low-salt butter).
- A medium-sized glass of fruit drink – either fruit juice (not squash – which doesn't count towards the 5-a-day quota) or a fruit smoothie.



An Post issued a 28p stamp in 1992 on Healthy Living

A sack full of fruit and vegetables

Unless you have been hiding under a rock for the past few years, you will know that eating plenty of fruit and vegetables every day is vital for great health. The average guide is to eat at least five servings each day (equivalent to 400g). Almost all fruit and vegetables count towards your five servings a day. What's more there's no limit to how much you can consume – so the more you eat, the better. It's also good to know that you should eat a variety of fruit and vegetables to get the maximum nutritional benefits. This is because they each contain different combinations of fibre, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. Besides, eating the same ones every day would be boring.

Reaching 5-a-day doesn't have to be difficult or unpleasant. Consider the following:

- A handful of raisins on your cereal in the morning is not only tasty – but counts as one.
- A glass of OJ and you're at two already.
- An apple will give you more long-term energy than a cup of coffee.
- Copy your favourite tennis player and grab a banana for extra energy.
- Chop up lots of vegetables and use them in a stir-fry. Quick, easy and super healthy.
- Add some mushrooms or peas in your curry – and you've hit 6-a-day. Easy Peasy.

Working food

Once at work, avoid snacking on chocolates, crisps, and other junk food. Instead of using the vending machine, take your own healthy snacks into work with you; fruit is a much better source of energy than chocolate and nuts are full of protein. If you really have to eat crisps, buy those that are at least low in salt and fat.

If you're lucky enough to have a canteen at work, you may well have your lunch there. Resist the temptation of 'chips with everything': chips are full of saturated fats, try a healthy alternative instead.

Possibilities include:

- Salad, rather than chips, with your meal.
- A baked potato with beans – which do count towards your quota, as well as being full of protein.
- Pasta dishes which include fruit or vegetables.
- Vegetable soup.

It's easy to
build

5

into your day.

One portion is:



*1 medium glass of
orange juice*



7 strawberries



*A handful of sliced
peppers, onions
and carrots*



1 medium apple



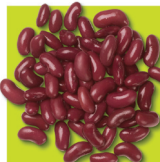
16 okra



1 medium banana



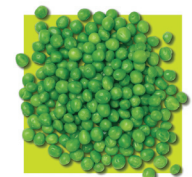
1 small mixed salad



*3 heaped
tablespoons of
cooked kidney
beans*



*3 whole dried
apricots*



*3 heaped
tablespoons of
peas*



1 handful of grapes



*1 tablespoon
raisins*



7 cherry tomatoes



*3 heaped
tablespoons of corn*



2 spears of broccoli

Starchy foods

You also need to make sure you have enough starchy foods in your diet. Most men should be eating:

- More bread, especially wholemeal or granary breads, but also seedy bread, chapattis, pitta bread, bagels and tortillas.
- More foods such as rice, pasta (wholegrain varieties where possible) and potatoes (but not chips).
- More beans, lentils or peas.

A sticky fingers diet?

Watch the fat in your diet. You should be cutting down on food that is high in saturated fat or trans fats which can increase the amount of cholesterol in the blood and increase the risk of developing heart disease.

Foods to go easy on include:

- Meat products, such as meat pies and sausages.
- Fast food.
- Hard cheese, butter and lard.
- Some margarines.
- Pastry, cakes and biscuits.
- Cream, coconut oil and palm oil.

Consider replacing these with foods high in

unsaturated fat which actually reduce the cholesterol levels, as well as providing essential fatty acids.

Foods high in unsaturated fats are:

- Oily fish (such as sardines or mackerel).
- Avocados.
- Nuts and seeds.
- Sunflower, rapeseed, olive and vegetable oils (and spreads).

Salt of the Earth

It's also important to cut-down the amount of salt in your diet. Although salt is vital for life, too much is harmful as it can raise your blood pressure. People with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke than those with normal blood pressure.

Ways to reduce salt include:

- Eating home-cooked meals wherever possible.
- Using fresh or frozen vegetables rather than canned ones.
- Eating fresh poultry, fish or lean meat, rather than smoked or processed types.
- Cooking rice, pasta and vegetables without salt.
- Cutting back on frozen dinners, pizza, instant rice and pasta, canned soups and salad dressings.

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- Avoiding foods preserved in brine (such as pickled vegetables) and condiments (such as mustard and ketchup, and barbecue sauce).

Well-watered

Finally make sure you get enough liquids during the day (and we're not talking about alcohol!). The best way to keep yourself hydrated is ... water!

- Start as you mean to go on, with a glass of water when you wake up (and not just when you've got a hangover).
- At work, keep a jug or bottle of fresh water close by so you can top-up your water levels throughout the day.
- When you're out and about during the day, try to carry a bottle of water with you.
- Keep eating those fresh fruit and vegetables as they have a high water content.

Useful contacts

Health Promotion Policy Unit
01 6354000
www.healthpromotion.ie

Safefood
021 230 4100/01 4480600
www.safefood.eu/

Irish Heart Foundation
01 6685001
www.irisheart.ie

Getting active – and getting your weight down

Even if you eat the correct foods and have a healthy balanced diet, it is still important to be active and fit. Research shows that fitness is a strong measure of health and can lead to an improved quality of life. Being fit improves your overall health and reduces your risk of disease.

Exercise (walking the walk!)

We should all be taking at least 30 minutes of physical exercise on most days of the week. Any activity that leaves you feeling slightly warmer and breathing more deeply counts.

Men who increase their activity level over a five year period cut their chances of dying early by almost half. This is true however old you are. Greater benefits can be obtained at higher levels of activity – but the greatest benefits accrue to those of us who go from no exercise at all to doing a little. Exercise will make you feel better,

DID YOU KNOW?

If everyone walked for at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week, 37% of heart attacks could be prevented.



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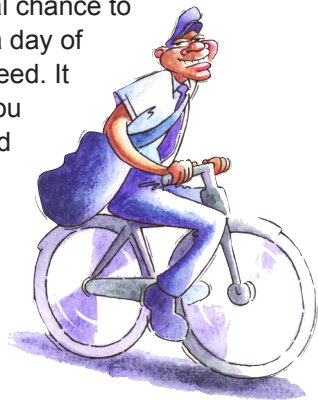
make you look better and who knows...maybe even make you more attractive to your partner or potential partner (showers permitting of course!).

Of course many jobs contain a significant amount of exercise within them. But if your job doesn't, there are simple things you can consider doing to make exercise part of your normal working day. And what better way to start than with the journey to work in the morning.

Travelling to and from work

The journey to work is an ideal chance to help build up the 30 minutes a day of regular physical activity you need. It also has added benefits, as you could save on petrol, fares and commuter stress.

Walking or cycling to work (or to the train station if you have a longer journey), instead of driving or using public transport, could make a huge difference. If it takes you 15 minutes each way, you would immediately achieve your recommended daily amount of exercise – and it may even take less time than battling through the traffic.



At work

There are a number of simple things you can do during the work day to stay active, remember the little things add up!

- Take the stairs instead of the lift, if you work on the top floor get off a few floors early.
- Take opportunities to walk around the office, deliver documents or messages to co-workers in person rather than by email.
- Go for a walk at lunch time and during breaks.
- Maybe join a sports team for lunch-time or after work.
- Obviously, if you are a postman on a foot or cycle route you may be well on the way towards getting good daily exercise.

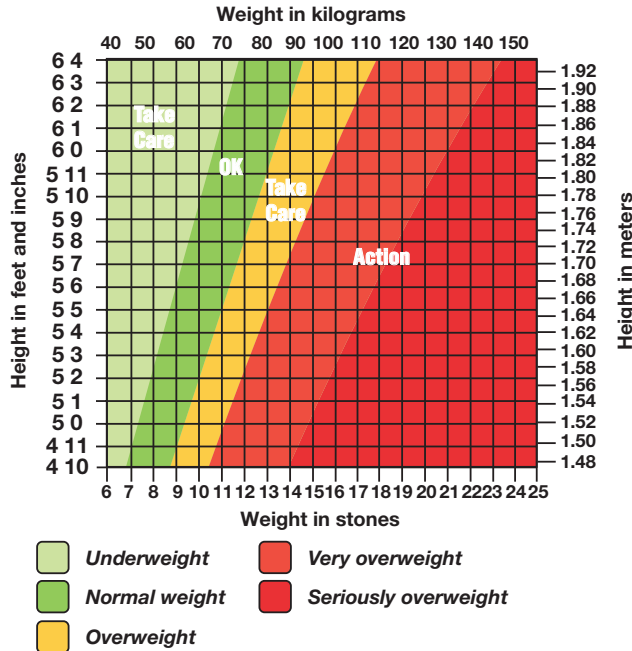
Your weight

Experts agree that in order to lose weight people should be active for up to 60 minutes at least three times a week, in addition to the 30 minutes of daily activity. This probably means taking up a sport or some other form of structured exercise – but it may also be possible to spend more time and push yourself harder in your everyday activities, such as walking to meetings at work, climbing stairs instead of using the lift – or doing more DIY in the evenings or at weekends.

The two main indicators of whether you need to lose weight are waist measurement and body mass index (BMI).

Waist measurement

- Find the top of your hip bone and the bottom of your ribs.
- Breathe out naturally.



- Place the tape measure mid-way between these points and wrap it around your waist.
- Make a note of the measurement.

If your waist measurement is over 94cm (37"), you should consider losing weight; if it is over 102cm (40"), you definitely need to lose weight.

Body mass index (BMI)

- Measure your height in metres and your weight in kilograms.
 - Divide your weight by your height squared = $\text{weight (kg)} / \text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}$
 - Make a note of the result (your BMI).
- Normal BMI for an adult is 18.5 to 24.9. If your BMI is over 25 you should consider losing weight; a BMI of 30 or over is considered obese and you definitely need to lose weight.

Useful contacts

Irish Sports Council
01 8608800
www.irishsportsCouncil.ie

Slí na Sláinte
Irish Heart Foundation
01 8304555
www.irishheart.ie

Back pain

The facts

- Most back pain is not due to any serious disease.
- The acute pain usually improves within days or weeks.
- Sometimes aches and pains can last for quite a long time. It will settle eventually, but no one can predict exactly when.
- Most people can get back in action quite quickly, even though they may still have some pain.
- Your back is designed for movement. The sooner you get moving and back to normal activities, the sooner you will feel better.
- Rest for more than a day or two can prolong pain and disability.
- How you handle back pain in the early stages is very important to the outcome.
- The longer you remain off work, the less likely you are to return.

Managing back pain

As soon as you develop back pain, start treating it immediately. It is difficult to keep moving and keep

positive, when you are in pain. Therefore, you need to deal with it right away. You need to control the pain.

Modern research has shown that keeping active and thinking positive are the best ways to deal with back pain. While your doctor and/or therapist can give you help, advice and treatment, the most important person in dealing with your back pain is YOU.

Try to stay at work or get back to work as soon as possible. It is not necessary to be pain free to be at work. However, you may need some help. There is a team of people to help you with your back pain and get you back to work: your doctor; your therapist; OHS; your manager and most important YOU.

Pain control

Simple over the counter painkillers like paracetamol or anti-inflammatories are very effective for back pain. Do not hesitate to take painkillers, if you need them. Some people worry that if they can't feel the pain, they may do something to cause damage. This is not so. Your body will not let you do any harm.

It is important that you take painkillers properly. Do not wait until the pain is out of control. Take the full

recommended dose and take them regularly every 4- 6 hours. Always read the label carefully.

Heat & cold

The use of heat and cold can be used to provide short term relief of pain. It will also help muscle spasm. You could try a cold pack in the first 48 hours. Wrap a bag of frozen food in a damp towel, and place it on the painful area. Leave it there for 10 minutes at a time. You may find that a hot bath or shower or a hot water bottle provides some temporary relief.

Stay active

Your back needs movement. If you don't keep moving you will get stiff and your muscles will become weak. Bed rest for more than a day or two will not help and may actually prolong the pain. Try to:

- Carry on as normally as possible. Early activity leads to faster recovery.
- Avoid staying in one position for too long.
- Move about before you stiffen up.
- Move a little further and a little faster each day.
- Stay at work or get back as soon as possible.
- Avoid bed rest. Gentle activity will aid your recovery; walking and swimming are excellent exercise. Start gently and do a little bit more every day.



Help from your doctor

If the pain persists or you can't remain in work, you should consult your doctor. He will probably advise you to continue with painkillers and keep mobile. He may recommend that you have some physiotherapy. He is unlikely to order further investigations such as x-rays, MRI scans or referral to a specialist unless the pain has persisted for several weeks, is very severe or you have certain signs or symptoms.

Consult your doctor if the following applies to you:

- Unexplained weight loss or fever.
- History of cancer, HIV or long duration use of steroids.
- Difficulty passing or controlling urine.
- Numbness around your back passage or genital area.
- Pain, numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in your leg.
- Unsteadiness on your feet.

X-rays & MRI scans

X-rays and MRI scans can detect serious back problems, but may be of little use in simple back pain. However, if they don't show anything serious, that's good news. In older people they may show evidence of 'degeneration'. This sounds bad but all it means is normal 'wear and tear'.

Absent from work with back pain

If you are away from work for prolonged periods with back pain, it is important that you stay in regular contact with An Post to make your manager aware of your situation, to be kept informed about developments at work and to discuss what adjustments might be needed once you are ready to return.

Discuss your needs with the OHS and follow advice on any practical workplace adaptations or alterations which might help you to cope while you return to full-time working.

Dealing with a period of back pain and returning to work

It is important to stay at work if you can, as this helps you to keep active and recover from the pain. If you have lot of lifting or other risk factors in your job, talk to your supervisor or boss and tell them about tasks that will be difficult to begin with initially.

A gentle return to full activity is better than weeks of lying in bed with a door under the mattress (in fact, lying flat in a bed for three weeks only makes things worse as it weakens the supporting muscles). Traction (putting huge weights on the legs) belongs in a museum of horrors – it would take a double-decker bus to counter

DID YOU KNOW?

You have a staggering 80% chance of developing low back pain at some point in your life.

the strength of the back muscles!

If you are suffering from a bad back, try to reduce the pressure on the spine by lying down; it can help to lie sideways with the legs slightly bent and a cushion between them. Tension is part of the problem, so getting someone to give you a gentle back massage can work wonders. Don't stay in the same position too long; although movement may be painful, it is best to roll over or even stand up and walk around for a few steps. A mix of non steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (such as ibuprofen) along with paracetamol can help enormously – always use them according to the instructions on the packet. Warm towels alternated with cool compresses can help relax muscles (warm) and reduce inflammation (cool). As the pain subsides try to regain normal activity but avoid lifting or straining.

Useful contacts

Health and Safety Authority

01 6147000

www.hsa.ie

Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists

01 4022148

www.iscp.ie

Arthritis Ireland

01 6618188

www.arthritis-foundation.com

An Post OHS – see back cover

Coping with stress



Pressure at work can be good for you, but if the experience of pressure is excessive or prolonged, you may begin to feel stressed.

Irrespective of the source of your stress, you should speak to your manager or someone else in An Post you feel comfortable confiding in. If you feel it is work-related, raise this with your manager. An Post has a duty to make a reasonable assessment and to try to resolve the problem. If it is not work-related, your manager may be able to support you in some way or help to take some pressure off you at work while you resolve the stress in your personal life.

A relentless build-up of pressure, without the opportunity to recover, can lead to harmful stress. The important thing is to recognise the warning signs while you can do something about it.

Common signs are:

- Eating more or less than normal.
- Mood swings.
- Poor concentration.
- Feeling tense or anxious.
- Low self-esteem.
- Not sleeping properly.

- Tiredness.
- Poor memory or forgetfulness.
- Excessive drinking and/or drug use.

The good news is that there are positive steps that you can take to deal with and manage stress, both at home and at work. Our five top tips are ...

1. Time out

It can be hard to be rational when you are feeling very stressed, which is why it's important to take some time out.

Quick fix

Physically removing yourself from a stressful situation, even for a few moments, can give you the space you need to feel more able to tackle the problem. If you anticipate a stressful day, try to get up a bit earlier to prepare for it instead of feeling rushed.

Long-term fix

Taking time out from your everyday routine may help you deal with, and avoid, stress. At work, try to avoid doing long hours, take proper holidays when you can, and plan your work.

2. Work out

Exercise can help to prevent stress related ill-health.

Quick fix

At work, get some fresh air and get moving during breaks. Go for a quick walk around the block. This can help clear your head and put problems in perspective so that you are able to tackle them with renewed energy.

Long-term fix

Aim to do at least 30 minutes of activity a day, as recommended to remain healthy. Regular activity may help reduce your stress levels as well as getting you fit and making you feel good.

3. Chill out

Making time for yourself mentally and emotionally, as well as getting enough quality sleep, is important so that you can focus on relaxing your mind and recharging your energy levels.

Quick fix

Learning simple relaxation techniques can be an effective way of helping you deal with feelings of stress – try these simple exercises.

Deep breathing – take a long slow breath in through your nose (breathing-in from your belly), then very slowly

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breathe out through the mouth; really concentrate on your breathing, and after a few repetitions you should begin to feel more relaxed.

Tensing and stretching your muscles – rotate your neck to the side as far as is comfortable and then relax; repeat on the other side; then try fully tensing your shoulder and back muscles for several seconds, and then relax completely.

Long-term fix

Plan time to relax, even if it's just having a long bath or listening to music. Try and have a good night's sleep – adults usually need, on average, 7 to 8 hours – and if this is not possible, aim to have at least 4 hours of sleep at the same time each day as this can help to keep your sleep clock regular. Relaxation techniques or meditation can also be useful for many people in helping them to feel more able to cope – you can buy relaxation music, and there are many types of relaxation classes available like meditation, yoga and Pilates.

4. Leave it out

Try to avoid taking refuge in smoking, junk food or alcohol! This won't help your stress levels. Avoid too many caffeinated and sugary drinks as they may make you feel more anxious and bursts of sugar can cause mood swings.

Quick fix

Drink plenty of water. This will help you concentrate better, and may stop you getting stress headaches which can be caused by dehydration.

Long-term fix

Improving your diet and drinking plenty of water will increase your body's resistance to stress. Eating fruit and vegetables really boosts your immune system, especially in times of stress. It's important to make time for proper meals to help you stay energised.

5. Talk it out

Talking about stress with family, friends or your mates may help you see things in a different light and find a way forward in tackling the underlying problems.

You may also want to consider talking to a healthcare professional, such as your GP or practice nurse, or use An Post OHS. Research shows that people with work-based stress have benefited from such services.

6. Finally, if you can't find a solution

You may need to highlight the problem with your supervisor and seek his/her support.

- Book a time to meet with them.
- Prepare; think about what is causing you to be stressed and any potential solutions you may have thought of.
- Think about positive changes that you would like to make to help you work more effectively.
- Make a list of points and questions that you want to cover.
- Help them to help you by giving them the information they need.
- Find out if there are any training courses (for example in time management or problem solving) that may help you cope better.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting to make sure that you are both happy with how things are progressing.
- If you don't want to speak directly to a manager, you could raise the issue with a staff or trade union representative who can then speak on your behalf.

Useful contacts

Mental Health Ireland

01 2841166

www.mentalhealthireland.ie

Aware

1890 303302

www.aware.ie

GROW in Ireland

1890 474474

www.grow.ie

Samaritans

1850 609090

www.samaritans.org

An Post OHS – see back cover

Shift work

When you work shifts, particularly night shifts, your body clock – which is linked to the cycle of night and day, light and dark – can become out of tune. Your body clock is responsible for regulating body rhythms which tell us things like when to be active, rest or sleep. It also controls things like digestion. You may find it difficult to digest certain foods at night, as your body clock slows down then. The following facts give you some ideas for helping you and your body cope with shift work.



Sleeping

- Try to have a regular pattern of sleep based around your work times. For example – try to have at least 4 hours of sleep at the same time each day to help keep your sleep clock regular.
- For some people, taking regular naps can help.
- If you need to get sleep during daylight, make sure your room is dark – black-out curtains may be a good idea or put a thick blanket over the window.
- Avoid too much caffeine (like tea, coffee and fizzy drinks), large meals or vigorous exercise just before going to bed.
- Take time to wind down before you go to sleep – try having a bath, reading or listening to relaxing music.
- Don't be tempted to fall asleep on the sofa – go to bed, you'll sleep better!
- Make your sleep as noise free as possible – switch off your phone and make sure your family and friends are familiar with your routine so that you are not disturbed. Ear plugs or even a 'do not disturb' sign may be a good idea, depending on how noisy your home is!
- Use time off to get extra rest.

Re-adjusting your sleep patterns in between shifts can sometimes be tricky

- After your last night shift, try sleeping for a maximum of 4 hours, then get up and continue the day as normal. This may help you get to sleep at your normal time later that night.
- Before starting morning shifts, go to bed early to help you get a good sleep.
- Before going back to a stretch of night shifts some people find it helpful to stay up late the night before and sleep in late on the morning of the first night back. You could also try and take a nap in the late afternoon before your first night shift.

Eating

Often, shift workers need to eat at night when the body clock is telling the digestive system to shut down. Try to:

- Avoid rich, greasy, fried and spicy foods which tend to sit in your stomach and can make you feel bloated and sluggish – especially during the night.
- Stick to a regular eating pattern to reduce cravings and if you have a family or are in a couple, try to have at least one meal a day with them.
- Start the day with protein and move onto carbohydrates before bed time.
- Eat nearer the start and middle of the shift rather than

towards the end.

- Bring healthy, light food and snacks from home – especially if your only option is fast food.

What type of foods are best for night shift?

- Light foods that are easily digested – like fish, chicken, vegetables, salad and fruit. Wholegrain bread and cereals are also good options.
- More carbohydrates (like pasta, bread and potatoes) than protein.
- Light snacks to keep your energy levels up and stop you from being hungry when trying to sleep. These include raisins, low fat yoghurt, plain popcorn and plain bread sticks.

DID YOU KNOW?

Staying active will help you cope with the demands of shift work and improve your quality of sleep!

Stopping smoking

Smoking is the single greatest cause of death in the developed world. It has killed more people than both world wars put together, commonly through lung cancer and heart disease. One in ten moderate smokers and almost one in five heavy smokers (more than 15 cigarettes a day) will die of lung cancer.

Smokers tend to develop coronary thrombosis (heart attacks) ten years earlier than non-smokers, and account for nine out of ten heart bypass patients. They also take 25% more sick days per year than non-smokers.

On a more positive note, the very moment you stop smoking your health will start to improve. After only twenty minutes of not smoking, your blood pressure and pulse return to normal. In just 48 hours, your body is nicotine-free and carbon monoxide is cleared from your system. And, within two to twelve weeks, your circulation improves and you feel noticeably fitter. Best of all, within

five years, your risk of lung cancer will have dropped dramatically, and your risk may be halved by the time you reach your tenth year of being cigarette-free.

Some people try to reduce their cigarette intake gradually. The trouble with this approach is that, as soon as something disturbs your concentration, the numbers tend to creep back up again. It's much better to stop outright.

Make sure you are fully prepared to give up. Many fail because they jump into the task before they are ready. Have a 'quit plan' and make use of all the sources of help available to you.

Ways to help you quit smoking

- Set a day that you will stop – and tell all your friends, family and workmates in advance so that they can support you.
- As with deep-sea diving, always take a buddy with you! If someone else gives up with you, you will reinforce each other's willpower; maybe you can persuade some of your workmates to give up at the same time.
- Clear the house (and your car, and desk, and anywhere else you keep them) of all your smoking materials – not just cigarettes, but lighters and matches, rolling papers, ashtrays, etc.

DID YOU KNOW?

Smokers are at least 50 percent more likely to have erection problems than non-smokers

- Chew on a carrot – not just good for your health anyway (another of your 5-a-day), but it will also give you something to do with your mouth and hands.
- Ask your friends not to smoke around you (or at least to pretend they're not enjoying it) – people accept this far more readily nowadays than they used to.
- Take things one day at a time, and mark your progress on a chart or calendar.
- Keep all the money you've saved separately – and then treat yourself with it.
- Make use of any prescription or non-prescription aids available (your pharmacist or GP can advise you on this); or maybe try alternative therapies like hypnotherapy or acupuncture.
- Join a 'stop-smoking' support group for both professional advice and support from other people.

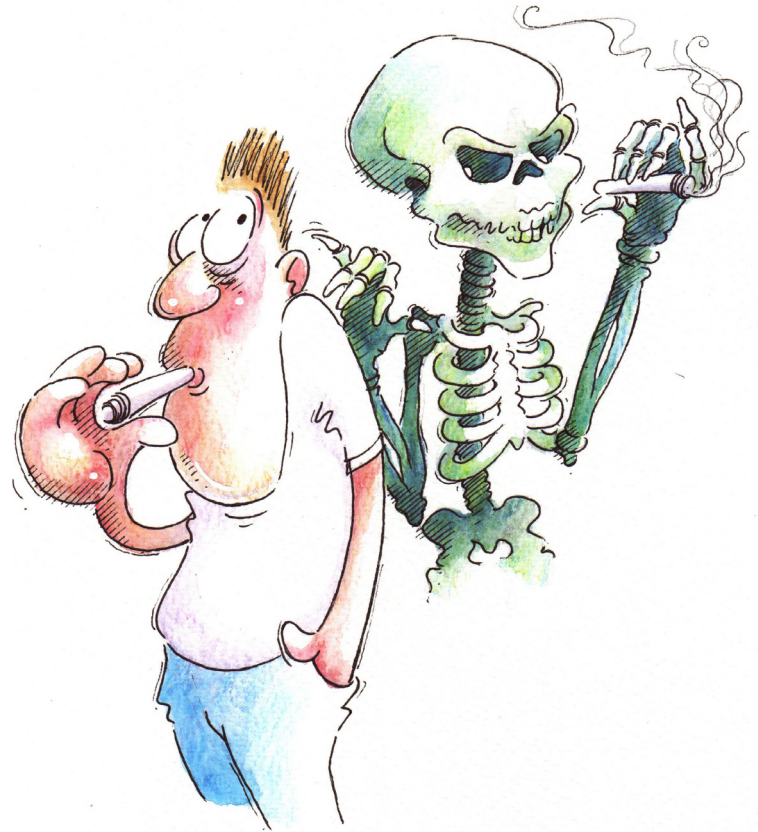
Useful contacts

National Smokers Quitline
1850 201203

Health Promotion Policy Unit
01 6354000

www.healthpromotion.ie

An Post OHS – see back cover



Drinking sensibly



A round or two (or three or four if it's Friday) with your workmates may seem a good way of rounding off the working day. The good news is that drinking in moderation can actually be good for your health, especially when it comes to preventing heart disease. It's thought that harmful fats in the bloodstream, partly responsible for blocking arteries, are reduced with moderate alcohol intake. Wine with a meal also probably improves digestion, not to mention conversation!

The problems start if you drink too much and too often. If you drink more than four units of alcohol a day (two pints of normal lager, or one and a half of strong lager), you are risking your health. Since the 1970s there has been an eight-fold increase in deaths from chronic liver disease amongst men aged 35 to 44. One in six people attending Accident and Emergency has alcohol-related injuries or problems – and this rises to eight in ten at peak times. Around 20% of psychiatric admissions are alcohol-related.

At work, accidents (sometimes fatal) are more common in the afternoon after lunchtime drinks. More than half of all fatal car accidents, falls and drownings are alcohol-related.

How do I keep track of my intake?

The risk of health problems steadily increase as you exceed an intake of ten units of alcohol per week. The currently accepted recommended maximum weekly intake for men is 21 units (and 14 units for women). Major problems become much more likely with a weekly intake of over 35 units for men (and over 21 units for women).

The number of units of alcohol in a drink depends on the amount (volume) and strength (%):

- Small glass of wine (125ml) at 12% = 1 ½ units.
- Large glass of wine (175ml) at 15% = 3 units.
- Bottle of wine (750ml) at 12% = 9 units.
- Bottle of wine (750ml) at 15% = 12 units.
- Pint of beer at 3.5% = 2 units.
- Pint of beer at 5% = 3 units.
- Single measure of spirits (25ml) at 40% = 1 unit.

Reducing the risks

There are also some other simple steps you can take to continue enjoying your evenings at the pub whilst avoiding the harmful effects.

- Walk to the pub and burn off some of the extra calories on the way.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after the pub. If you're thirsty, you'll tend to drink more alcohol.
- Drink after a meal rather than before; you won't feel so hungry and won't feel like drinking so much.
- Cut down the strength of your drinks. If you normally drink strong lager (5%), try switching to a normal lager (3.5%).
- Try to have one alcohol-free day each week – and if you can manage that, then go for two or three.

Avoid mixing alcohol and work. As already pointed out, not only does the lunchtime pint impair work performance and increase your chances of an accident in the afternoon, it also uses-up some of your precious 'maximum units'.

DID YOU KNOW?

Remember a pint may have up to 500 calories, nearly a quarter of your required daily intake

If you do overdo it ...

If you do drink too much and get a hangover, drink plenty of water and take some paracetamol as directed on the pack.

You will probably also find yourself feeling tired. Many believe that booze helps you sleep, but in fact, dreaming is essential for a satisfying night's sleep and heavy drinking does not help.

Do not drink and drive. People underestimate just how long alcohol stays in the bloodstream after a night's drinking, and you may well still be over the legal limit for driving the next day. Twelve units (approximately four pints of strong lager) will take twelve hours to be completely flushed out of the system (1 unit per hour is a useful rule of thumb and 2-3 units is the drink driving limit). If you go to bed with a skinful at 3am, you are unlikely to be sober enough to drive to work or safely operate machinery the next day!

Useful contacts

HSE infoline
1850 241850

Health Promotion Policy Unit
01 6354000
www.healthpromotion.ie

An Post OHS – see back cover

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie

Al-Anon
www.al-anon-ireland.org

Testicular cancer

Testicular problems are quite rare, and testicular cancer is the most serious. It represents only 1% of all cancers in men, but it is the single biggest cause of cancer-related death in men aged between 18 and 35.

Symptoms of testicular cancer:

- A lump on one testicle.
- Pain and tenderness in either testicle.
- Discharge (pus or smelly goo) from the penis.
- Blood in the sperm when you ejaculate.
- A build-up of fluid inside the testicular sac (scrotum).
- A heavy dragging feeling in the groin or scrotum.
- An increase in the size of a testicle.
- An enlargement of the breasts, with or without tenderness.

Self tests for testicular cancer

For once, men are positively encouraged to check their testicles, but this time to do more than just 'check they're still there!' Self-examination is the name of the game. Check your testicles every month in the following ways:

- Do it lying in a warm bath or while having a long shower, as this makes the skin of the scrotum softer.
- Hold the scrotum in the palm of your hand and feel the difference between the testicles. You will very probably feel that one is larger and lying lower, which is completely normal.
- Examine each one in turn, and then compare them with each other. Use both hands and gently roll each testicle between your thumb and forefinger. Check for any lumps or swellings as they should both be smooth. Remember that the duct carrying sperm to the penis, the epididymis, normally feels bumpy. It lies along the top and back of the testis.

Checking your testicles too often can actually make it more difficult to notice any difference and may cause unnecessary worry - so don't overdo it.

Erectile dysfunction (ED or impotence)



Problems with erections are common. At least one in 10 Irish men have had some sort of erection problems at some stage in their lives and around one man in 20 has permanent erection problems. This is not helped by most men not wanting to talk about these problems, despite the fact that virtually all erection problems can be sorted out with simple treatments.

At one time, what a man was thinking about was considered the major factor for erection problems. We now know that around one-third of all cases will be due to psychological issues and can often respond well to non-clinical treatments such as sex counselling. Normally, if you have erections at any time other than during attempted intercourse, you have a psychological rather than physical problem. Getting an erection during television programmes, sexy movies or self-masturbation is a good physical sign, although it is not a 100% sure test.

DID YOU KNOW?

It is very important to find out what is causing the problem, as diabetes and high blood pressure are conditions which are commonly linked to impotence.

Prostate problems

Only men have a prostate gland. It's round and about the size of a golf ball. It is in the pelvis, against the base of the bladder. The prostate surrounds the urethra – the tube that runs from your bladder inside your penis to the outside (you urinate through it). Imagine the prostate as a fat rubber washer around a bit of tubing. It grows to adult size during puberty. In most men it also begins to grow again in early middle age, which can cause problems.

There are two possible causes of an enlarged prostate:

- Benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH) – a benign (non-cancerous) enlargement of the prostate gland, common in men over 50.
- Prostate cancer.

The symptoms are very similar and are usually related to problems urinating, such as the following:

- A constant need to urinate, especially at night.
- Rushing to the toilet.
- Difficulty starting to urinate.
- Difficulty urinating.
- Taking a long time urinating.
- Having a weak flow of urine.

- Feeling that your bladder has not emptied properly.
- Dribbling after you've finished urinating.
- Pain or discomfort when urinating.

Other symptoms can include the following:

- Lower back pain.
- Pain in your pelvis, hips or thighs.
- Erection problems.
- Blood in the urine – this is rare.
- Pain when you ejaculate.
- Pain in your penis or testicles.

It is important that you know that any of these symptoms can also be caused by problems which are nothing to do with prostate cancer. If you are concerned about any symptoms that you have, visit your doctor.

Enlarged prostate (BPH)

BPH rarely causes symptoms before the age of 40, but more than half of men in their sixties and as many as 90% in their seventies and eighties have some symptoms of BPH.

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As the prostate enlarges, tissue layers surrounding it prevents it from growing evenly, and pressure then squashes the urethra like a clamp on a garden hose. As a result, the bladder wall becomes thicker and irritated, shrinking even when it contains small amounts of urine, causing more frequent urination. The bladder will eventually weaken and lose the ability to empty itself, trapping urine inside.

Many of the problems linked with BPH are caused by:

- Narrowing of the urethra.
- Incomplete emptying of the bladder.

Some men with very enlarged prostates might not suffer while others with less-enlarged prostates can have more problems.

The problem can be treated with drugs or by surgically removing the enlarged part of the prostate. There is a small risk that either treatment may cause impotence (being unable to get and keep an erection) but you can speak to your doctor about this.

Prostate cancer

Men who have had a close male blood relative, especially a brother, with prostate cancer seem to have an increased risk of getting it. Older men of African or Caribbean origin are also at high risk of getting prostate cancer.

The Western diet of highly refined food with a high animal fat content seems to increase the risk of developing prostate cancer. There is no firm evidence of how to reduce the risk of prostate cancer. We do know that having a healthy diet with more fruit and vegetables, less red meat and more fish is good for reducing the risks of other cancers, heart disease and possibly prostate cancer.

It is important to be clear – not all men get symptoms that show they have prostate cancer. In the men that do, not all have exactly the same symptoms. You do not have to have all the symptoms listed to have prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is treated in several different ways, and it can depend on how aggressive the cancer is, whether it has spread elsewhere in your body and how old you are. Your general state of health may also make a difference. Your doctor will discuss the options with you.

DID YOU KNOW?

You may be able to reduce your risk of prostate cancer with the occasional Bloody Mary, preferably with more tomato juice than vodka. Tomatoes are said to protect you.