



change of heart

HANDBOOK

A HANDY GUIDE TO A HEALTHIER HEART



Ireland needs a
Change of Heart



MINISTER'S FOREWORD

I am delighted to send you this handy guide to a healthier heart. I strongly urge you to take some time to read it and to keep it for future reference.

Heart disease is the biggest cause of death in Ireland. Unfortunately, twice as many Irish people die prematurely of heart disease than on average in the European Union. Living with heart disease is an everyday reality for thousands of Irish people and families. That is why it is so important to start making those changes which will help to reduce the risk, or if you are living with heart disease, help to improve your quality of life.

As the old Irish proverb goes *Tús maíth, leath na hoibre* – a good start is half the battle. Small changes like being active, eating healthily or not smoking are vital steps towards maintaining a healthy heart.

This guide has useful and practical advice to encourage and support you to make that change.

The handbook is part of my response to the National Cardiovascular Strategy, *Building Healthier Hearts*, which sets the way forward to healthier hearts for Ireland.

Micheál Martin

Micheál Martin, T.D.

Minister for Health and Children

STRIVE FOR 5

The Healthy Heart Handbook will help you “Strive for Five” - five things which you can do to feel well, be active... and enjoy heart health.

Try to stop smoking – or don’t start!

4 out of 5 smokers want to quit. There is no shortage of support to help you stop.

See page 4.

Eat more fresh fruit and vegetables and less fatty foods and fries. Enjoy a drink in moderation.

For healthy eating guidelines, *see page 6.*

Have regular check-ups, especially for cholesterol and blood pressure.

Your doctor’s guidance will help you get started.

See page 9.

Relax and learn to manage the stress in your life. There are ways in which we can all learn to relax and cope with stress.

See page 11.

Get up, get out, get active!

Increase your physical activity and make it part of your day. *See page 12.*





MAKE YOUR LIFE A SMOKE-FREE ZONE!

You know that by stopping smoking you will reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Like many Irish people, you do plan to stop some day.

Already over 400,000 Irish people have quit successfully.

SUPPORT FOR QUITTING

There are now many supports such as nicotine replacement therapies to help you stop smoking. Consult your pharmacist or doctor about the various choices.

For further advice and support contact your local Health Board – see back cover for details or phone the national Quitline at the Irish Cancer Society 1850 201 203.

TIPS TO QUIT SMOKING

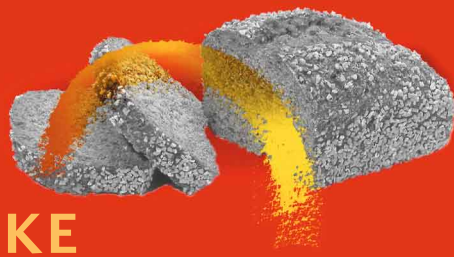
1. Write down the reasons for quitting, and keep them handy as a reminder.
2. Plan the day for quitting and stick with it.
3. Seek the support of family, friends and co-workers, asking them to be understanding.
4. Avoid places and routines, initially, which you usually associate with smoking.
5. Regular physical activity will help you manage your weight and relieve stress. It can be an ideal distraction or alternative activity when trying to quit.
6. Think positive! You may experience withdrawal symptoms once you stop smoking. These are positive signs that your body is recovering from the effects of tobacco. They are all perfectly normal and should disappear within a few weeks.
7. When you have cravings...
Delay for at least 3 minutes and the urge will pass.
Drink a glass of water or fruit juice.
Distract yourself. Move away from the situation and do something different.
Deep breathe...Breathe slowly.
8. Start saving money. Put away what you would normally spend on tobacco and watch your savings grow. A 20-a-day smoker will save nearly £1,500 a year.
9. If you are worried about gaining weight, try some fruit or sugar-free gum instead of snacking on chocolate bars and biscuits.
10. Take it one day at a time! Remember – every day without a cigarette is good news for your health, your family and your pocket.



HEALTHIER EATING = A HEALTHIER HEART

As well as helping you look good and feel great, healthy eating will help keep your weight, blood pressure and blood cholesterol at healthy levels. Healthy eating doesn't mean expensive eating. Simple changes like the way you cook food is what makes it healthy or unhealthy – think of the difference between a boiled potato and chips.

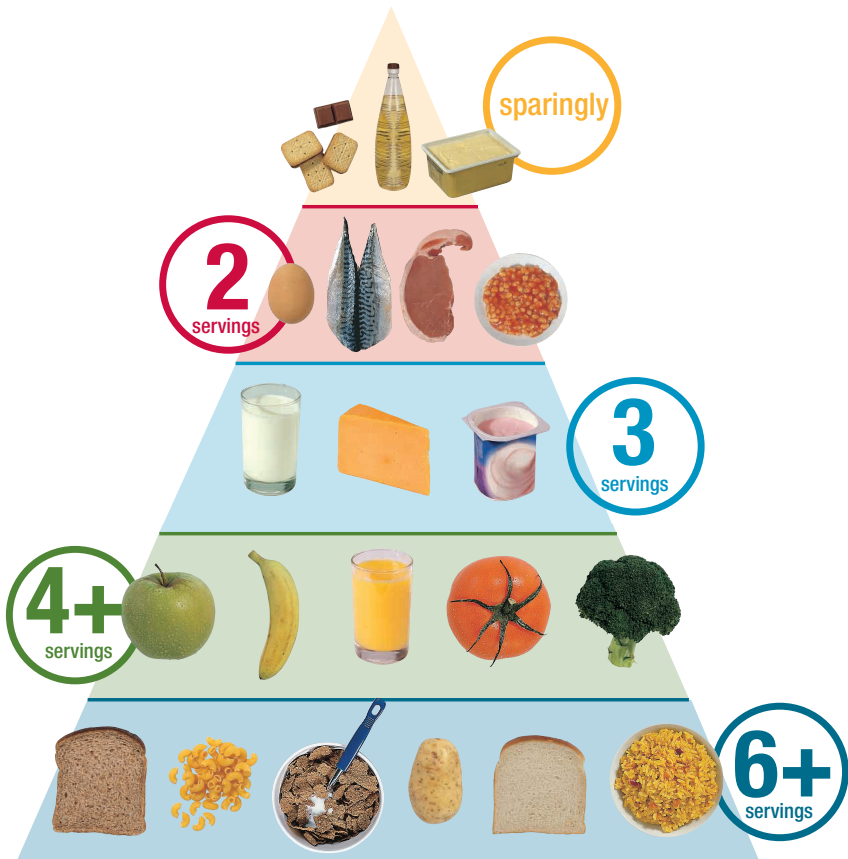
There are no good or bad foods – treats are fine now and again. But it's important to get the balance right. Use the Food Pyramid as a guide and try to improve your healthy eating habits gradually, on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis. You can enjoy a drink – but not too much, too fast, or too often.



TIPS THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. Eat fewer high fat foods from the top shelf of the Food Pyramid.
2. Use low fat ways of cooking: oven-bake, grill, boil, steam or microwave.
3. Choose lower fat or leaner choices. Milk, cheese and yoghurt are excellent sources of calcium, and meat contains iron – but go for low fat or lean options.
4. Change to a low fat spread or one labelled ‘high’ in polyunsaturates or ‘high’ in monounsaturates. Use sparingly.
5. Eat 4 or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day.
6. Make bread, cereals, potatoes, rice and pasta the main part of your meal. You’ll have less room for high fat snacks.
7. Drink plenty of fluids – up to eight glasses or cups a day.
8. Aim for a healthy weight. Use the Food Pyramid as a guide for a healthy weight-reducing programme.
9. Enjoy your food! Go for fresh food as often as possible.
10. Be active! The right foods and regular physical activity go hand in hand. Getting this balance right will help you maintain a healthy weight for life.



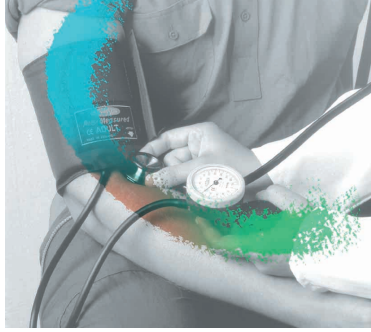


HOW TO USE THE FOOD PYRAMID

The number of servings you need each day is given on each shelf.

- For variety, choose different foods from each shelf every day.
- Remember – the way you cook your food is really important, so oven-bake, grill, boil, steam or microwave.





CHOLESTEROL AND BLOOD PRESSURE

High cholesterol and high blood pressure are two of the major risk factors for heart disease. The only way to know if you have either a high cholesterol level or high blood pressure is to have them checked by your family doctor. Your family history of heart disease, age and other risk factors will be considered in deciding what advice and action is best for you.

Luckily for many people both of these problems respond well to changes in lifestyle and can be managed by you and your doctor.

WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance, which is produced by the liver and is needed to help our bodies function properly. If the level of cholesterol is too high, it begins to build up on the artery walls, reducing blood flow to the heart and brain.

Eating too many foods high in saturated fats increases cholesterol levels. Saturated fats are found in cakes and biscuits, fatty and processed meat and dairy foods. The guidelines on page 8 will help you look after your heart and get the right balance of fat in your diet.

WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure influences the amount of work that your heart has to do in order to pump blood around the body. When blood pressure is high, it adds to the workload of the heart and arteries, causing damage over the years.

High blood pressure may be lowered by losing weight, healthy eating, eating less salt and drinking less alcohol.

If you have either high blood pressure or high cholesterol, or both combined, stopping smoking is also an important step in reducing your risk of heart problems.



MANAGING STRESS

Stress is a fact of life. Some stress is actually quite healthy.
Stress helps us get up and get going.

Stress can be a problem when we feel there are too many pressures and too few ways to deal with them. This can cause distress. Frequent stress over a sustained period may harm health, relationships and overall well-being.

Everyone feels stress in different ways. What causes you to feel stressed may be the very thing which gives your friend a great “buzz”. Very often, people who feel under too much stress may turn to unhealthy choices – smoking, drinking, excessive eating – which in turn increase their risk of heart disease.

Think about some of these ways listed on the following page for coping with stress and try those which are best for you.



TIPS THAT WILL HELP MANAGE STRESS

1. **Use the right fuel.** Follow the healthy eating guidelines and reduce the intake of caffeine and processed foods.
2. **Work off stress.** Physical activity helps you to produce the body's own 'happy hormones'. This gives that 'feel-good' factor.
3. **Learn to say no.** Be honest with yourself and others about what you can do in a given time.
4. **Talk to someone you really trust.** Talking to friends can help solve the problem and reduce stress.
5. **Manage your time better.** Develop a system that works for you, not against you. Learn to prioritise.
6. **Self talk.** We talk to ourselves all the time. Are you giving yourself positive messages or putting yourself down?
7. **Change a stressful situation.** If shopping on a Friday evening gets you down, look at another option.
8. **Learn to relax.** Try going to the cinema, listening to music or doing something you enjoy.



GET ACTIVE!

Regular physical activity is good for your heart and you feel good too. It helps you keep a healthy weight, maintain healthy levels of blood pressure and cholesterol, and manage stress.

HOW MUCH AND WHAT TYPE?

Any activity is worthwhile...the more the better!

For good heart health, you should take at least 30 minutes of physical activity, most days of the week. The 30 minutes can be broken into 2 or 3 shorter sessions.

The activity should cause a slight but noticeable increase in your breathing and heart rate and may bring a slight sweat to your brow.

The type of activity depends on you – on what you enjoy and what is convenient. Activities which use the heart, lungs and large muscles are described as aerobic and are of most benefit to the heart. Good examples are walking, dancing, cycling, swimming, step aerobics and active sports. Always warm up at the beginning and cool down at the end.

The best way to increase your level of activity is to build physical activity into your daily life at home, at work and at play.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Be creative! There are all sorts of activities which are right for you!

- Find a friend to be active with for walking, running, cycling...
- Walk or cycle to your place of work or to the shops.
 - Get off at an earlier bus or train stop and walk or jog the rest of the way.
 - Use the stairs instead of the lift.
 - Join a sports club, walking club, aerobics class or local leisure facility.
 - Look for your local “Slí na Sláinte” route. These “Paths to Health” are marked with colourful signposts situated at 1-kilometre (a little over 1/2 mile) intervals.



LISTEN TO YOUR BODY!

Never push your body too much! You should always be able to carry on a conversation during activity. Stop immediately if you feel unwell or are in pain during activity. Talk to your doctor if your symptoms remain or return.

Start any new activity slowly, gradually building up to the recommended level over weeks or months. If you have a history of heart problems or other major illness, talk to your doctor before you start.

IN AN EMERGENCY...

Prompt action in the event of heart attack ensures quicker access to emergency services and a better guarantee of recovery.

A HEART ATTACK – THE WARNING SIGNS

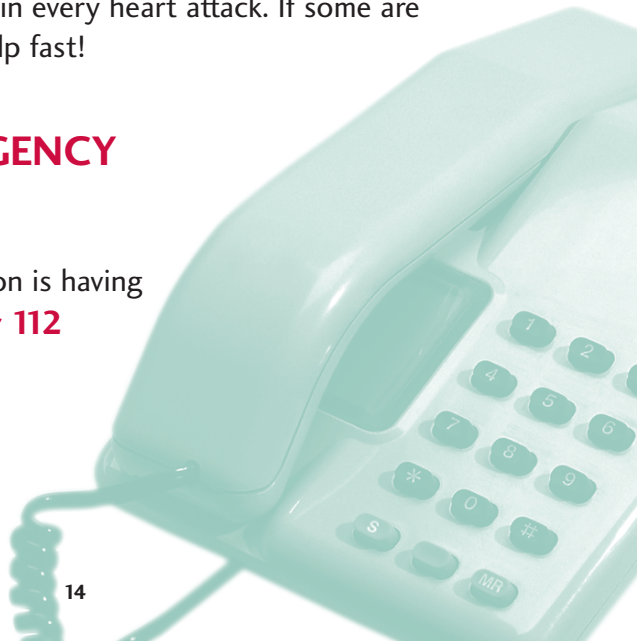
A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to the heart is cut off. The warning signs may include:

- Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing or pain in the centre of the chest which lasts for more than a few minutes.
- Pain which spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms.
- Discomfort in the chest area, along with light-headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

Not all of these signs occur in every heart attack. If some are present, don't wait – get help fast!

PHONE THE EMERGENCY SERVICES

If you recognise that a person is having a heart attack, **ring 999 or 112** immediately.



HOW WELL DO YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR HEART?

Just about everyone can do something which will improve their health. Every step we take towards better overall health is a step closer to a healthier heart.

Take a look at how well you are looking after your heart by doing this short Healthy Heart Quiz. It will help you pin down those changes which are most important for you.

Tick the box with the answer which is closest to your own situation.

1. Do you smoke?

No 0 1-20 a day 3 More than 20 a day 4

2. Do you eat chips, fried foods, cakes and biscuits?

Occasionally/Never 0 Some days 1 Most days 3

3. Do you eat fresh fruit and vegetables?

Most days 0 Some days 1 Occasionally/Never 2

4. Do you take regular physical activity?

Most days 0 Some days 1 Never 2

5. Do you take more than 2 – 3 alcoholic drinks a day?

Never 0 Some days 1 Most days 2

6. How would you describe your weight?

Normal 0 A little overweight 1

More than 2st overweight 2

TOTAL



Add up the score inside the ticked boxes. The lower your score, the better you are at looking after your health and your heart. If you have scored more than 4, try to make at least one change now.

This quiz is a guide. It is not a diagnosis on how your lifestyle influences your health.

For further information, contact the Health Promotion Office in your local Health Board

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Your local GP _____

Your local hospital _____



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