

## **Men and Heart Disease Factsheet**

There are many diseases that can affect the cardiovascular system including diseases of the valves of the heart, diseases of the heart muscle and diseases of the arteries and of the veins. By far the most common occurs as a result of hardening of the arteries, 'atherosclerosis', which most often leads to a heart attack, and to stroke.

During 1989-1998, the death rate from diseases of the circulatory system was 61% higher for males than it was for females<sup>1</sup>.

The death rate from diseases of the circulatory system for males in Ireland is significantly higher than the (combined) EU-15 countries. In France, for example, the standardised death rate per 100,000 men for ischaemic heart disease was 78.2 compared to 261.6 in the Republic of Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

The standardised mortality rate from diseases of the circulatory system was 120% higher in the lowest occupational class compared with the highest occupational class<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Risk factors***

Smoking, raised blood pressure, raised cholesterol, overweight, diabetes and physical inactivity are risk factors, which men can change or modify to help reduce their risk.

A study of over 1,000 people in Cork and Kerry carried out in 1998 shows that of the men sampled (aged 50-70 years), over 70% had high cholesterol and half had high blood pressure<sup>3</sup>.

In 2003, the National Health and Lifestyles Survey found that over half of men were overweight or obese<sup>4</sup>.

Physical activity has a beneficial effect on risk factors for heart disease, including managing weight help to maintain healthy blood pressure and HDL cholesterol.

Between the ages of 18 – 34, over one fifth of men took part in no physical activity on a weekly basis. By age 55 and over, this figure rises to over one third of men.

In 2002, slightly less than half of males surveyed took part in some form of Physical Activity each week, a slight decrease on 1998 figures. (This is defined as mild exercise most days of the week, and/or moderate exercise three or more days per week and/or strenuous exercise three or more days of the week)<sup>4</sup>.

Excessive alcohol consumption is linked to heart disease. Data from a study of men from the South East shows that 25% of respondents were excessive drinkers (21 units or more per week) while 34% reported at least weekly binge drinking (6 units or more)<sup>5</sup>.

In October 2005, 24% of the Irish population were cigarette smokers, with equal numbers of males and females smoking<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Prevalence in Ireland***

In Ireland in 2004, 5,214 women and 5,394 men died from diseases of the heart and circulatory system<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Key Messages for prevention:***

Enjoy life. Take time out for yourself and keep in touch with friends

Be active – at moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes most days

Eat more fruit and vegetables and less fat and fries

Stop smoking

Go easy on alcohol

Have regular blood pressure and cholesterol checks with your family doctor

Know your family history and the signs and symptoms of heart disease.

## References

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