

## **Smoking fact sheet**

Smoking is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. <sup>1</sup> Cardiovascular disease refers to diseases of the heart and circulatory system. Smokers double their risk of having a heart attack compared with non-smokers <sup>2</sup>

In Ireland more than 7,000 people die from diseases related to smoking and thousands more become ill from the affects of smoking. <sup>3</sup>

Research conducted by the Office of Tobacco Control in Ireland (2005) showed that smoking prevalence in Ireland is 24%, which is a decline of 7% since 1998. There is an equal number of men and women smoking in Ireland. This research also showed that smoking is highest among skilled working class with the lowest prevalence among farmers <sup>4</sup>

### **Smoking and the heart?**

- Smokers have a higher risk of developing atherosclerosis (hardening and narrowing of the arteries supplying blood to the heart) than non-smokers.<sup>5</sup> Atherosclerosis reduces the blood supply to the heart muscle which may lead to angina or heart attack.
- Nicotine, the addictive component of the cigarette, stimulates the body to produce adrenaline, which causes an increase in both heart rate and blood pressure.
- Smoking affects the clotting system in the blood by causing it to clot more easily and become stickier. A clot that suddenly blocks an artery in the heart can cause a heart attack or similarly a blocked artery in the brain can cause a stroke.
- Smoking increases blood cholesterol levels, it raises the bad cholesterol and reduces the good cholesterol.
- Carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas found in tobacco reduces the amount of oxygen available to the cells and thus makes the heart work even harder.

- Cigarette smoking may also cause the blood vessels in the legs and feet to block which causes poor circulation and circulatory disease. This may result in gangrene and amputation.
- Smoking increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes in women using the oral contraceptive pill.

### **Benefits of quitting**

It is never too late to stop smoking, the benefits begin as soon as an individual stops. Those who quit smoking at age 60, 50, 40, or 30 respectively will gain about 3,6,9, or 10 years of life expectancy. <sup>6</sup>

For more information on quitting smoking contact the **National Smokers Helpline 1850-201-203**

### **Economic burden of smoking**

1) According to Aspect, an EU commissioned report there is very little information on the direct and indirect costs of smoking in Europe. Some estimates are available for individual countries like the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Iceland and the UK but they each estimate using different methodology, which makes comparisons difficult. On an annual basis €74 billion is spent treating cardiovascular diseases in the EU15. According to Aspect it is possible to attribute about 16.28 billion of direct costs and about 23.32 billion of the indirect costs of treatment of CVD to smoking in EU15. These are conservative estimates <sup>7</sup>

2) Research in the UK has shown that the cost to the NHS of treating diseases caused by smoking is approximately 1.5 billion a year. Other costs include payment of sickness or disability benefits to those suffering diseases caused by smoking *etc.* Helping individuals to stop smoking is cost effective in health care compared with other treatments. In the UK the cost of prescribing drugs to lower cholesterol (statins) is estimated to be between £5,400 and £13,300 per life-year gained whereas the cost of smoking cessation advice is estimated to range from £212 to £873 per life year gained <sup>8</sup>

## References

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