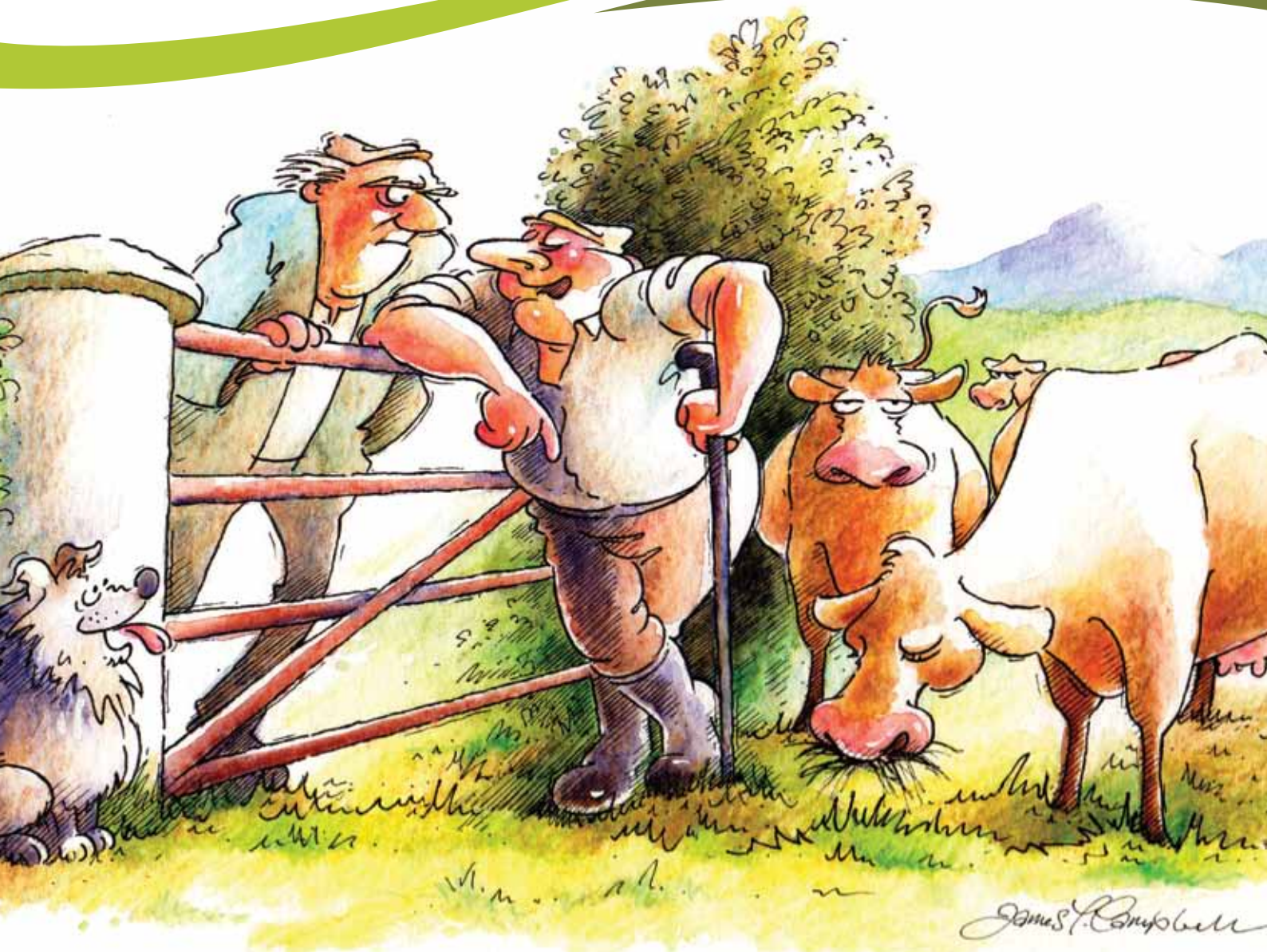


# Staying Fit for Farming

A health booklet for Farmers



# Acknowledgements

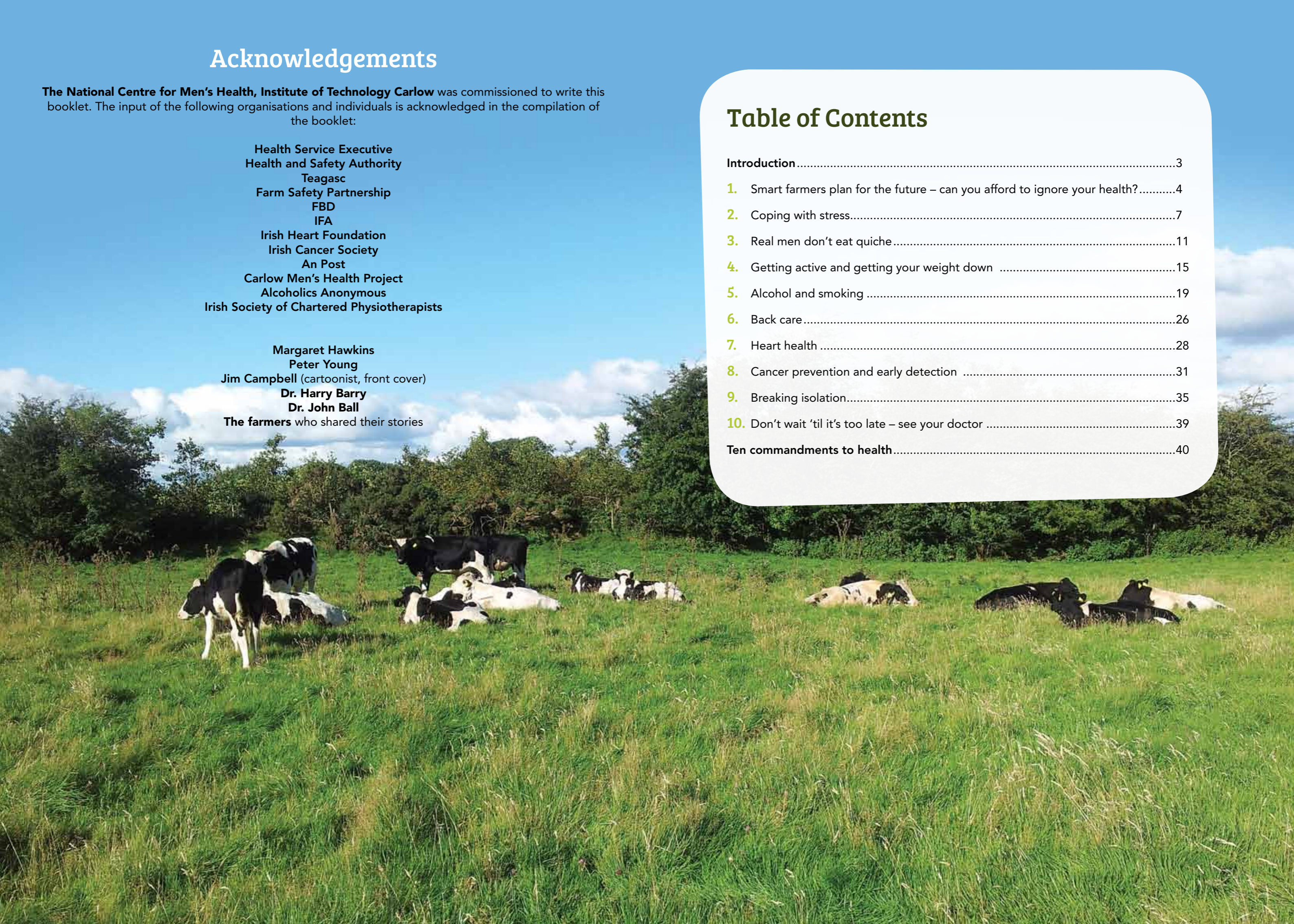
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## Introduction

There is nothing more satisfying than walking through a group of healthy livestock knowing that they are thriving. As you walk, you listen and watch them carefully. You look for signs and ask yourself questions such as: are they coughing; or slow to rise? Sometimes you just get a gut feeling that something is not right with one of them and you act on that alone. You know that your gut feeling has often proved to be right and having caught them early they are quickly back in form. It also makes life easier when you just get up onto your tractor, safe in the knowledge that it is well maintained and ready for work. Good farmers know that this attention to detail is important for the productivity and profitability of their farm.

However, very often farmers overlook the most important element to good farming – themselves. This booklet is about looking after yourself. It looks at different situations and illnesses and sets out how you can see the symptoms early. In this booklet some farmers tell their stories, not to make you worry, but to make you act.

Too often aches and pains can be pushed aside as you feel you are too busy to deal with them. In some cases you don't want to talk to anyone about how you're feeling. Days can often turn into weeks and even months. We often hear of the high incidence of deaths and accidents on our farms. What goes unsaid, is where an illness or condition is not caught in time, it is left go too long by the farmer or farm worker without dealing with it. This booklet sets out what you should look out for, what you can do and where you can turn to make contact if you do feel that you are physically or emotionally unwell. Just like when you are herding your cattle or working with your tractor - acting early if you see a problem can make a big difference. It will certainly ensure you and others working in farming can continue to enjoy life as well as farming for a long time to come.



# Smart Farmers Plan for the Future – Can you afford to ignore your health?

## Introduction

Farming is different to most other occupations, not least because, as most farmers will tell you 'a farmer's work is never done!' There have been significant changes to farm work practices in recent years which have added further to the challenges faced by farmers. Keeping up with the pace of change can feel like 'you are running faster to stand still'. Many farmers push themselves too hard when carrying out their day-to-day work activities – in the belief that 'if you are not working, you are not earning'. The difficulty is, however, if you push yourself too hard, you can end up running yourself into the ground and putting not just your health, but your livelihood at risk. So it can be helpful to remember the 3 Ps – prioritising, planning and pacing - when it comes to getting the balance right. If you prioritise the things that really matter to you, plan your time effectively and pace yourself, then you make the most of your time and you are more efficient and productive on the farm. Good use of the 3 Ps can help you maintain the right balance and stay in good health, and ultimately get the most out of your enterprise.



## 3 Ps – Pathway to Success

**1. Prioritising:** Prioritising activities on the farm means making choices about what to do and when to do them. In any one day or week, you have only so much time and energy. So, it is important to make the most of your time.

It might help to begin by separating jobs into different categories - 'daily' (e.g. milking or feeding cattle), 'seasonal' (e.g. calving or spraying) and 'other projects' (e.g. farm maintenance work). There is little choice with the 'daily activities' – they simply have to be done! However, it is worth making some decisions about prioritising the other two categories to ensure that you attend to the most important jobs first and that you spread your workload out over time to avoid too many jobs piling up at once. It is also important to get a good balance between those jobs that simply have to be done and those that you enjoy doing. We all need a good balance of both in order to make the most of our lives.

So, it is worth thinking about the various jobs on the farm. Ask yourself questions such as "what needs to be done today, this week or this month?" and "what jobs take priority?" Setting priorities each week will help you to keep control of your workload.

**2. Planning:** Having made some decisions about what you are going to prioritise, you now come to the second P – Planning.

Allocate sufficient time to your 'daily' activities. Plan ahead for busy 'seasonal' periods and be careful not to take on too many 'other projects' during these periods. Try to ensure that these 'other projects' are not all planned for the same time but, instead, are well spread out.

When you are planning jobs, check that you are giving yourself a reasonable chance to finish jobs and to take breaks between activities. Allow yourself enough time to achieve those activities and tasks that you have planned. In this way, you will find that you can enjoy the satisfying feeling of having accomplished something that you have set out to do. Always consider if you need help with the work.

**3. Pacing:** Farming can be a bit like a marathon race and so pacing is very important! Having prioritised and planned your work routine, 'pacing' means spending just enough time on an activity to get the most you can out of it, without pushing yourself beyond your limits. Pacing means organising your time and work routine on the farm so that you can do roughly the same amount of work from day to day. It's based on planning what you're going to do, rather than simply responding to what needs to be done at any given time. Pacing yourself is easier said than done. So what are the most common difficulties farmers have in pacing themselves? How can these difficulties be tackled?

**i** Pacing means organising your time and efforts so that you can do roughly the same amount of activity from day to day

### ***"It's the odd occasion when you do stop that you realise how tired you really are"***

It is possible to become so involved in a particular task that you lose track of time and forget to take a break. This can lead to mistakes and injuries. Better pacing means knowing when to stop and take a break, and finding signals and reminders to do this. So, what can you do? You might place a clock in view or even set a reminder on your phone to go off after a certain amount of time. Or, you might be able to break the job into smaller tasks or even break up tasks by carrying out a different activity in between.

### ***"I don't really know how to switch off"***

This can be another common difficulty. To make good use of a break, it's important to switch off completely and to do something different; even if it's for a few minutes. So walk around, do some stretching exercises, put on the radio or go for a cup of tea – you will come back recharged and re-energised. It can be useful to plan what you are going to do for your break.

### ***"I just go on how I'm feeling at the time"***

It is important to listen to our bodies but unfortunately many of us are quick to ignore what our bodies are telling us. Many of us fall into the habit of pushing ourselves too hard and only drawing breath when our bodies are at breaking point or in pain. Remember, pain is usually your body's way of telling you that you've overdone things. So, it is better to pace yourself more effectively by using time limits that you have set yourself in advance or by breaking down activities into smaller tasks. Avoid pushing yourself to exhaustion – any short-term gain may be at the expense of your body breaking down in the long run.

Prioritising, planning and pacing can help you to make the most of your time and your body so that you can enjoy better health and be more productive on the farm. Now, spend some time thinking about how you can prioritise, plan and pace your own time. In doing this try to come up with 3 goals for yourself in response to these questions:

Question		Personal Goals	
1	How can I <b>prioritise</b> my time most effectively?	1	
		2	
		3	
2	How can I <b>plan</b> my work activities more efficiently?	1	
		2	
		3	
3	What can I do to <b>pace</b> myself better?	1	
		2	
		3	

### USEFUL CONTACTS

**Teagasc**  
0599170200  
www.teagasc.ie

**Health And Safety Authority**  
01 6147000  
www.hsa.ie

## Coping with Stress

### Introduction

Stress is normal and part and parcel of our daily lives. In fact, a certain amount of stress is a positive thing – it can help to make us more focused and more productive in our work and in caring for our families.

Major life events such as the death of a loved one, divorce and marital separation have been identified as highly likely to result in stress. Concern over financial issues also rates quite highly in terms of stress. At the lower end of the scale might be attending to paperwork or handling cattle at the mart! A combination of major life events on top of everyday stresses within a short period of time will significantly increase the risk of stress symptoms.



The main problem with stress is when we feel overwhelmed by too many demands – be they work, family, financial etc. – and lose confidence in our ability to cope. For some of us, we may not be aware or fully recognise what is causing us to be stressed. This makes it more difficult to deal with the problem. Others might feel embarrassed or afraid to talk about being stressed. However you should be assured that the brave and responsible thing to do is just that – to talk, to try to get to the bottom of the problem and, when we need to, to have the confidence to seek help from a

friend or a health professional. If we do not learn to deal effectively with stress, over time it can impact in a very negative way on our health. Most of us have experienced feelings such as being worried, being tense or feeling unable to cope. The good news is that there are things you can do to manage stress at home and on the farm, with support from those around you. Talking to someone and sharing your concerns can have almost immediate benefits.

“Winding down time is non-existent for farmers”

“There’s no end to it [paperwork]. Every time the postman comes, it’s more paperwork to fill out”

## Stress signals?

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 warning signs are:

- Eating more or less than normal.
- Mood swings.
- Not being able to concentrate.
- Feeling tense.
- Feeling useless.
- Headaches.
- Feeling worried or nervous.
- Not looking after yourself.
- Not sleeping properly.
- Being tired.
- Being forgetful.
- Excessive drinking.

## Why bother?

Stress can trigger anxiety and depression which can be difficult to recover from and you can experience physical symptoms such as:

- Back pain.
- Indigestion.
- Irritable bowel syndrome.
- Migraine.
- Heart and artery disorders.
- Rashes, allergies.

## Top Tips for dealing with Stress

Unfortunately, many men struggle with their stress alone and rely on unhealthy coping methods such as drinking more alcohol, smoking more cigarettes or gambling.

However, there are many more positive and productive ways of dealing with stress. Try out some of these top ten stress-busting tips:

1. **Work it off:** Doing exercise gives you energy and makes you feel better.
2. **Get enough sleep:** Rest is important to revitalise your body and mind.
3. **Keep it simple:** Take things one step at a time; be aware of negative thoughts and try to focus on the positive.
4. **Take time to relax:** Make time for yourself. Do something you enjoy such as going to a match, listening to music or reading.
5. **Prioritise:** Review how you organise your time. Prioritise tasks, make lists and reward yourself for doing them.
6. **Be assertive:** Don't try to please everybody. Learn to say 'no'.
7. **Try to eat healthy:** Eat lots of fruit and vegetables and drinks lots of water. Cut down on eating foods that are high in fats, sugars and salt.
8. **Keep your mind active:** You can do this by playing cards, doing quizzes or crosswords, or researching something you are interested in on the internet.
9. **Get it all off your chest:** 'A problem shared is a problem halved'. Simply talking to someone you trust can really help.
10. **Accept the things you cannot change:** Focus your attention and energy on the things that you can do and that you have control over and try to accept that there are certain things you cannot change.





**Very often people turn up at doctors' surgeries because of physical symptoms but stress is at the back of it... the key message is to be aware of what's going on in your body and make lifestyle changes to alleviate the stress before it leads to serious illness or depression**

*(Dr Harry Barry, author of 'Flagging Stress: Toxic Stress and How to Avoid it')*

**It's important not to be afraid to talk about the whole issue of mental health... Talk about it early on – before it reaches crisis point... That's the key message**

*(Margaret Healy, IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Chairperson)*



### USEFUL CONTACTS

#### Mental Health Ireland

01 2841166  
www.mentalhealthireland.ie

#### GROW in Ireland

1850 609090  
www.grow.ie

#### Aware

1890 303302  
www.aware.ie

#### Samaritans

1850 609090  
www.samaritans.org

## Real men don't eat quiche

### Introduction

We are all used to hearing men with expanding waist lines talk about being 'naturally big-boned' or 'having the wrong metabolism'! Some would even claim to being 'the victim of a very bad sweet tooth' or 'having to eat what's put in front of me'! The truth is that Irish men are getting bigger – expanding outwards rather than upwards – and farmers are no different. Becoming overweight or obese significantly increases your risk of developing a number of very serious health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, stroke and some cancers. Eating too much of the wrong types of food can also be bad for your health. A lot of farmers are not aware of the links between the food that they eat and their health. The very notion of 'healthy eating' can be seen as a woman's thing and therefore 'unmanly' so many men tend to eat too much meat, processed foods, fried foods and snacks that are high in fat, sugar, salt, and calories. Men also tend to be less conscious of their weight than women, in many cases, only becoming concerned when their weight has reached a crisis point.

The body needs the right fuel to operate and work effectively. Choosing the right amount and the right type of fuel is the key. However, getting the balance right in terms of how much we eat and what we should or shouldn't eat is not always easy.

### So why eat healthily?

**Eating a well-balanced diet can seriously improve your health by:**

- Providing you with the right fuel to work effectively.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Lowering your blood cholesterol.
- Preventing high blood pressure.
- Improving your energy levels.

**A healthy diet can help lower your risk of getting heart disease (which is the single biggest killer), diabetes and cancer.**

## Heavyweight Issues

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

**Good gut size:** Men with a waist size of more than 94 centimeters (37 inches), or women with a waist bigger than 80 centimeters (32 inches), have increased health risks. A waist measurement of over 102 centimeters (40 inches) for men, or 88 centimeters (35 inches) for women, can lead to serious health risks.

### How to measure your waist

- Find the top of your hip bone and the bottom of your ribs.
- Breathe out naturally.
- Place the tape measure between these points and wrap it around your waist.
- Make a note of the measurement.

**Body mass index (BMI):** Normal BMI for an adult is 18.5 to 24.9. If your BMI is over 25 you are considered overweight; a BMI of 30 or over is considered obese.

### How to measure your BMI

- Measure your height in meters and your weight in kilograms.
- Divide your weight by your height squared = weight (kg) / height (m) x height (m).
- Make a note of the result.

If your waist measurement or BMI is over the recommended guidelines you should visit your GP.

## What is healthy eating?

It is a myth that a healthy diet means you can only eat small portions of tasteless foods. Eating healthily doesn't need to be boring and it is not about depriving yourself of the foods you love. A healthy diet should have all the essential things your body needs and should have the right balance of foods from the food pyramid.

Just a few small changes to what you eat can make all the difference to your health. Knowing what foods to eat as well as which foods to limit is the key to healthy eating. The Food Pyramid is there to guide us on this. It is essential for men to eat well to maintain their strength, virility, stamina and vitality for living.

**"I feel much healthier now with some of the weight gone. Now I find myself noticing other men coming out of shops with big breakfast rolls and bottles of sugary drinks and I say to myself 'you're a candidate for where I've been'."**

Mervyn Agar, Carlow farmer and truck driver who was diagnosed with type II diabetes in 2009.



## Understanding the Food Pyramid



## Top Tips to a healthy weight

1. Follow the food pyramid guidelines – limit your food choices from the top shelf.
2. Reduce the size of your food portions.
3. Don't skip breakfast – a good bowl of porridge will keep you going for the day!
4. Choose healthy, low-fat ways of cooking – avoid frying and rich sauces.
5. Eat fruit and other healthy snacks between meals if you are hungry.
6. Plan your food shopping in advance – decide for yourself on your healthy food choices and don't shop when you are hungry.
7. Remove the salt from the table - leave the salt in the sea where it belongs!
8. Reduce alcohol or cut it out altogether if you are trying to lose weight – it is full of empty calories.
9. Get active – remember, its not just about how much or what you eat; how much fuel you burn off is equally important.
10. Don't go it alone – get support from family or friends or from a health professional.

**i** Research has found that people who are obese at 40 can lose up to seven years off their life!

### USEFUL CONTACTS

#### Health Promotion Policy Unit

01 6354000  
www.healthpromotion.ie

#### Safefood

021 2304100/ 01 4480600  
www.safefood.eu/

#### Irish Heart Foundation

01 6685001  
www.irisheart.ie





# Getting active and getting your weight down

## Introduction

Traditionally, farming was one of the most active occupations. However, the evolution of tractors, combine harvesters, milking machines, ATV's and jeeps has replaced a great deal of the labouring and physical aspects of farming. As a result, while farmers are still busy, farmers are not as physically active as they used to be.

Regular physical activity or exercise has been shown to have a hugely positive influence on both physical and mental health. It reduces your risk of heart disease, diabetes and a number of cancers as well as being a very good way to manage stress and to control your weight. However many farmers are not doing enough physical activity to have good health. Some reasons for this are:

- Farmers spend more time sitting while machinery 'does the work'.
- Some farmers stop taking part in sport when they feel that they can no longer do it competitively.
- Many farmers struggle to find time for themselves when balancing their work and family life.
- Some farmers simply get out of the habit of exercising and are not sure how to start back or what kind of exercise to do.

## Being Active

- Keeps your heart strong.
- Helps to manage your weight.
- Keeps your joints moving and flexible.
- Strengthens your muscles and bones.
- Helps you to relax and sleep better.
- Gives you more energy and zest for life.
- Helps you recover after a heart attack.
- Gives you a feeling of well being.

## So how much activity is enough?

The experts say that people should accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on at least five days a week. For some, this could mean going for a brisk walk; for others, it might mean doing something more structured such as going to the gym or playing 5-a-side football. It doesn't mean having to run a marathon! And remember, it's never too late to start – in fact, the more unfit you are, the more you have to gain for your health. Just be sure to do what's right for you and if you don't know get advice from your doctor or an exercise instructor. If you have not exercised for years or if you are concerned about a health issue, you should talk to your doctor before you start. Use the physical activity pyramid below to plan what activities you might build into your everyday life.

## Farmer's Activity Pyramid



Source: Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists

## Activity Check

(For each of the questions below, circle the word that best describes you)

1. Are you physically active in the home (for example gardening and DIY)?

never some days every day

2. Are you physically active at work?

not active (sitting and driving) light activity (some walking) heavy manual labour

3. Do you do any physical leisure activities (for example walking, cycling or swimming)?

never some most days

4. When you exercise, do you do so:

lightly moderately or vigorously?

5. How would you describe your weight?

more than two stone overweight about two stone overweight fine, maybe a little overweight

6. Would you describe yourself as fit for your life?

very unfit quite fit very fit

**Mostly green** - Well done. Keep up the level of physical activity in your daily routine.

**Mostly orange** - Try to include more activity in your weekly schedule and aim to include at least three sessions of 30 minutes continuous aerobic activity.

**Mostly red** - You need to be more active. Start gradually and work towards building up to about 30 minutes of any activity most days of the week.



**FRANK BUTTIMER** (55) is a part time farmer and a milling company worker from Bandon, Co Cork. In 2006, he weighed 27 stone 7 pounds. He was on medication for high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. He was also experiencing joint pain. He lost a massive 13 stone 10 pounds between 2006 and 2008 and now weighs 13 stone 11 pounds. He is delighted with the difference the weight loss has made to him. His medication is "all but gone", he says, and he was able to have a hip replacement operation in 2010 – something that would have been impossible without the weight loss.

He tells us how he did it: "I'd been heavy since I was a child, but it gradually built up over the years. I was fond of the wrong kinds of food: fries, butter on potatoes, cakes, all sorts. I tried to lose weight a couple of times by myself, but failed. My weight really came under the spotlight when I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. I lost a couple of stone after being referred to a dietician, but I put it back on afterwards. I was 27 and a half stone when I started attending a weight loss clinic. At that point, I knew I wasn't going to be around for very long if I continued the way I was. Everything was an effort, and I was very tired at night, and getting clothes to fit me was difficult too. My wife Sandra suggested it. Walking in the door that first day, I said: 'This is just another fad diet, and it's not going to work.' I had no idea that I'd ever achieve what I have. After the first consultation, I said: 'I'm going to give this a go.' The leader talked to me about lifestyle, a food plan and about the consequences of doing nothing. We had a consultation for 15 minutes each week. I lost between one and four pounds every week, and I built up my walking to over an hour a day –sometimes more. My weight is now monitored every month. I'd encourage anyone to lose weight. I don't know myself since I did it."

We know of no single intervention with greater promise than physical exercise to reduce the risk of virtually all chronic diseases simultaneously (Booth, 2000)

All parts of the body which have a function, if used in moderation and exercised in labours in which each is accustomed, become thereby healthy, well developed and age more slowly, but if unused and left idle they become liable to disease, defective in growth and age quickly

(Hippocrates (460-370 BC))

## USEFUL CONTACTS

**Irish Sports Council**

01 8608800

[www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie)

**Irish Heart Foundation**

01 6685001

[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

**Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists**

01 4022148

[www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie)



# Alcohol and smoking

## Introduction

Alcohol can be an enjoyable part of life for many people who drink socially without experiencing any problems. Moderation is the key - some would say that drinking in moderation can have a beneficial effect on health! In fact, going to your local pub with friends has traditionally been an important aspect of rural life reducing isolation and stress.

On the other hand, there is a darker side to alcohol. The amount that can be consumed without risking your health is less than most people would think. As a result, a large number of people are left with health, relationship and workplace problems as a result of excessive drinking,

## How much is too much?

You can gauge how much you drink by referring to 'standard drinks' Table. Many of us are not content to just go for 'one or two' social drinks; we tend to pack our drinking into one or two 'heavy sessions' in the week. This is known as binge drinking and it is associated with particular risks to health, even if a person drinks less than what is deemed the 'weekly limit' (see below), in terms of health it can have negative effects on your health.

## What is a standard drink (SD)?

A single measure of spirits (as measured in pubs)

A small glass of wine (100 ml) – Note: a bottle of wine contains 7-9 standard drinks

A pint of beer = two standard drinks, (more depending on the beer strength)



**Weekly limit:** In Ireland, we use 11 (female) and 17 (male) standard drinks (spread out over the week) as a general guide for low risk drinking (as defined by the Department of Health and Children). Remember, this is a limit – not a target!

## Warning indicators

General indications of 'problem drinking':

- Health problems; Mood swings, anxiety symptoms; Personality change: Irritability and aggression.
- Memory loss and blackouts.
- Secret and /or solitary drinking.
- Family disharmony.
- Drink driving.

## At work

- Letting jobs slip on the farm.
- On the farm, but 'under the influence'.
- 'Near misses' using farm machinery.
- Physical signs: smell of alcohol, accidents and incidents, mood swings, over-reaction to criticism or questioning, friction with family or neighbours.

**If alcohol is interfering with your life or work in any way, you should immediately cut back on how much you drink.**

**If you are worried about your drinking, what might you do?**

- Assess your intake.
- Don't panic! In most cases all that is required is a reduction in the amount you consume and a change in the pattern of consumption (some will need specialist help).
- Seek medical advice – go to your GP or other health advisor; consider attending a self-help group such as "Alcoholics Anonymous".

**There are many good reasons why some people decide to reduce their drinking and/or to change their drinking patterns such as:**

To feel happier.	To have fewer arguments.
To sleep better.	To remember everything that was said and done.
To discourage children from drinking or from drinking in a particular fashion.	To reduce blood pressure.
To have more energy.	To lose weight and be more fit.
To enjoy a better sex life.	To avoid serious health problems.
To save money.	To be safer (e.g. using farm machinery).

## Top Tips to reduce your drinking:

1. Write down three personal reasons why you might think about changing your alcohol consumption:  
1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Don't worry if you tried to reduce your drinking before and it didn't work - try again!
3. Anticipate particular problems in trying to cut down – for example an upcoming function or a particular occasion or someone who expects you to drink. Identify what times, occasions, situations, events where your plans to cut back might be at risk and think of ways of avoiding or combating them.
4. Follow and stay below the weekly limit guideline – 11 (female) and 17 (male) standard drinks (spread out over the week).
5. Count your drinks – making the effort to count how many drinks you have may also help you to slow down your drinking.
6. Measure your drinks – know the measurement of a standard drink so you can accurately measure how many you have had (a pint of beer = two standard drinks (depends on the beer strength))
7. Space your drinks – try drinking non-alcoholic beers or beverages between drinks particularly at events such as weddings.
8. Give a definite 'NO' – have a convincing 'no thanks' ready for when you are offered a drink when you don't want one.
9. Avoid drinking at home and avoid triggers – think about what triggers your urge to drink and make a plan to avoid them.
10. Don't go it alone – if proving difficult get support from your family or friends or from a health professional.



**If you are afraid of alcohol withdrawals or are experiencing alcohol related physical, mental or emotional problems already, seek medical help**

*I was about 11 or 12 years old when I had my first drink. By my late teens I was really enjoying drink and my whole social life was geared around the pub. In due course I inherited the family farm. Despite the responsibility, bit by bit, my heavy drinking in the pub in the evenings with the lads became lunch time drinking too. Money became tight so I resorted to selling off sites of land, but the money only went to pay off debts in bank and the pubs. It was a terrible mark of shame to me to be selling off our family farm of generations to keep me in drink. Things only got worse over the years. My family had no options but to have me hospitalised in a psychiatric ward. Doctors told me I had liver and kidney damage and I was heading for a wet brain. Such was my inability to grasp reality that I actually thought once I get out I'll be able to drink normally again. Two AA members came to visit me in hospital and suggested I come with them to an AA meeting. I was always thinking at the back of my mind 'I'm not like these people, I'm not an alcoholic'. Then one day out of the blue someone told a drinking story and I identified with their rock bottom. I understood that what I had was a physical allergy combined with a mental obsession. All I had to do was just not take that first drink. I never realized that when I was leaving that hospital 7 years ago that life could be as good for me and my family as it is today. 'teach us how to laugh again but don't ever let us forget how we cried'.*



Watch this farmer's story and others on [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

### USEFUL CONTACTS

**HSE infoline**  
1850 241850

**Health Promotion Policy Unit**  
01 6354000  
[www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

**Alcoholics Anonymous**  
[www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

**Al-Anon**  
[www.al-anon-ireland.org](http://www.al-anon-ireland.org)

## Smoking

### Introduction

Smoking has killed more people than both world wars put together, commonly through lung cancer, stroke and heart disease. One in two smokers will die young. Smokers tend to develop heart attacks ten years earlier than non-smokers, and account for nine out of ten heart bypass patients.

On a more positive note, the very moment you stop smoking your health will start to improve. So it's never too late to stop, no matter what age you are or how long you have smoked.

### Why quit?

- Cigarette smoke contains about 4,000 chemicals including tar, nicotine, arsenic, ammonia (floor cleaner), acetone (nail polish remover) toluene (solvent & explosives ingredient) and a whole lot more.
- 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.
- Within two to twelve weeks, your circulation improves and you feel noticeably fitter.
- After one year your risk of having a heart attack is cut to half that of a smoker.
- 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.
- You will have more money in your pocket. If you smoke 20 a day you will save over €3,000 per year (€260 per month).

Ex-smoker **MICHAEL McGLOIN** has COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary disorder) which causes damage to the lungs' airways and is mainly due to cigarette smoking.

*"If people saw the photo of me on the ventilator – and knew what it's like to have to be hooked up to it for 8 hours a day - they'd give up smoking or better still they'd never start."*



## Top Tips to help you quit smoking:

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.

- Your GP is a valuable source of advice and help on quitting, and can also prescribe medication to help you through.
- Your local HSE Health Promotion Team employs Smoking Cessation Officers who organise stop smoking clinics and provide advice to community groups.
- Your GP or pharmacist can also offer advice on nicotine replacement therapy which is available in the form of gum, patches, inhalers and tablets.

### Tips for quitting:

- Set a day that you will stop – and tell all your friends, family and workmates in advance so that they can support you.
- Clear the house, car, tractor or anywhere else you keep them, of all your smoking materials – not just cigarettes, but lighters and matches, rolling papers, ashtrays, etc.
- 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.
- If you have any withdrawal symptoms, these are positive signs that your body is recovering from the effects of tobacco and usually disappear within a few weeks.
- Join a 'stop-smoking' support group for both professional advice and support from other people.
- Cravings can occur often during the first few days after stopping. A craving only lasts 3 to 5 minutes.
- At the early stages avoid places or situations that trigger smoking, such as pubs, friends that smoke.

### The 4Ds can help you get through a craving:

- **Delay** at least 3 to 5 minutes and the urge will pass.
- **Deep breaths.** Breathe slowly and deeply.
- **Drink** a glass of water or fruit juice.
- **Distract** yourself. Move away from the situation.

TOM, 56, a Wicklow horse owner, has been off cigarettes for two years.

*"The first benefit I noticed after giving up smoking was that my pocket was heavier but that wasn't the main thing. The best thing about giving up was that after only three or four days I felt free. I wasn't a prisoner anymore in the sense that I didn't have to get into the car in the morning and go to the shop to get cigarettes before I fed the horses. The same in the evening after I'd finished a job and I'd look in the packet and see I only had two left and I'd say 'feck it, I may go and get fags. There was that much time saved - and diesel. Most people don't count those things - that's why I'd say that I was really spending a €100 a week, if it stopped at it. That's over €5000 a year which is a lot of money".*



*"Once I gave up the fags, I realised just how much money I was saving! I can afford a holiday for the family now and I feel a hell of a lot better."*



*"I'd been saying for years I was going to quit smoking but never did. Once I knew I was going to be a father, I made up my mind and that was it. I just went cold turkey."*



*"I phoned the National Smoker's Quitline and they really helped to put me straight. I used the patch for about 2 months. I'm not saying it was easy but so far so good. I'd recommend talking to the experts and getting good advice."*

### USEFUL CONTACTS

**Irish Heart Foundation**

1890 432787  
www.irishheart.ie

**The National Smokers' Quitline**

1850 201203  
www.quit.ie

**Irish Cancer Society**

1800 200700  
www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risksmoking

**Health Promotion Unit**

01 6354000  
www.healthpromotion.ie

# Back Care

## Introduction

A painful back is one of life's miseries and because other people cannot 'see' the pain it gets little sympathy. 1 in every 2 farmers have suffered from back problems at some time in their life. Back pain can be associated with reduced work ability, lower farm income and poorer quality of life which can also lead to the onset of other health problems including stress or depression. If you have back pain, you should talk to your GP or a qualified health professional, such as a chartered physiotherapist.

## What causes back pain?

There are 33 bones in the spine called vertebrae. Between each bone is a disk, which has a jelly-like centre and is surrounded by thick cartilage. These give the spine flexibility to move without damaging the spinal cord which runs through it. Your back is supported by strong ligaments and muscles, including those that also support the arms, legs and head. Over-stretching or injury to the spine can lead to severe pain and even loss of movement in the limbs. Most back pain is caused by muscle, ligament or joint sprain.

### Other reasons for back pain include:

- A slipped disk or trapped nerve.
- Arthritis caused by wear and tear.
- Osteoporosis.
- Stress.

Occasionally, back pain may be a sign of another illness. You should talk to your GP if you experience back pain or any of the following:

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine.
- Numbness in the genital or back passage area.
- Numbness, pins and needles or weakness in both legs.
- Unsteadiness on your feet.

Serious back pain is often caused by poor systems of work and simply not lifting things properly. Back injury can be avoided through forward planning and using a knowledge of safe lifting principles, ensuring good work posture, use of mechanical aids and good housekeeping.



## How can I take care of my back?

There are a number of things you can do to take care of your back and prevent back pain.

**Be active:** Regular physical activity will help keep your back strong and flexible. Aim for 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity physical exercise where you raise your heartbeat, sweat lightly but can still carry on a conversation. Specific exercises that strengthen your abdominal (stomach) and back muscles can help prevent back pain.

**Maintain a good posture:** Poor posture can strain ligaments in your back. Learning and practicing good posture while sitting, standing, driving, and sleeping can help prevent back pain.

**Lift things the correct way:** Before you lift you should think about and plan what you are going to lift. First try avoid and minimise lifting by using mechanical means. If unavoidable only lift what you are able to lift safely. Bend your hips and knees so that your stronger legs, not your back do the work.

## What should I do if I have back pain?

When things go wrong you need to ignore medical myths and follow current advice. Managing your pain and staying active will help your back recover. Serious back pain may need rest or to be checked by a doctor.

Try to reduce the pressure on the spine when lying down. It can help to lie sideways with your legs slightly bent and with a cushion between your legs. Tension is part of the problem and a gentle back massage can be really effective. Don't stay in the same position too long – roll over or even stand up and walk for a few steps. Painkillers and anti-inflammatory medications may help control the pain. Your pharmacist or GP can advise you on suitable medication. Swapping between warm towels and cool compresses can help relax muscles and reduce inflammation. As pain reduces, try to move around as normal but avoid lifting anything or straining your back.

**DAVID BUTLER** from Athy, Co Kildare, made the decision almost 10 years ago to leave suckler farming at the age of 55, having suffered with a bad back for several years.



He blames general wear and tear, as well as heavy lifting for his sciatica. "Suckler farming was heavy going," he explains. "Dosing cattle, calving cows and castrating bullocks -- it all took its toll on my back." Despite regular trips to the chiropractor and other physical therapists, David was spending several weeks of each year in pain. "I would completely lock up with muscle spasms, even when I was doing something as simple as getting out of the tractor to open a gate," he explains. "I remember one time I ended up on my hands and knees on the ground, stuck there with my back in spasm. I eventually had to crawl back to the tractor and drive home," he recalls. Bouts of severe sciatica could last weeks at a time, although David still considers himself lucky. "I have what plenty of farmers would have, years ago, it used to be known as chronic lumbago," he says. "But thankfully I've never needed to have an operation."

David advises other farmer to take care of their back and not to put too much pressure on it, as he has found out, prevention is better than cure.

Today, David urges others suffering from back pain to see a health professional. "Go to your GP, chiropractor, osteopath, physiotherapist or a sports injury specialist, anyone who can help," he advises. The Kildare man credits his current regime of long walks and hill walking with keeping his back pain at bay. "I find hill-walking brilliant because it stretches all those muscles," he says. "When my back is bad, I could walk 10 miles to relieve it."

...actual prevention is better than a cure... but if you have a problem don't ignore it

When I was younger it was like go go go and if it had to be done it had to be done... you had this Herculean thing about you but in the long run it will affect you

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Health and Safety Authority

01 6147000  
www.hsa.ie

### Teagasc

0599170200  
www.teagasc.ie

### Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists

01 4022148  
www.iscp.ie

### Arthritis Ireland

01 6618188  
www.arthritis-foundation.com

# Heart Health

## Introduction

Great strides have been made in recent years in treating and managing cardiovascular disease. Nevertheless, it remains the number one killer in Ireland. Overall, men are more at risk of dying from cardiovascular disease than women and are considerably more at risk of dying prematurely from the disease. There is a lot more that each one of us can do to reduce our risk of developing the disease, particularly by paying more attention to reducing lifestyle risk factors such as smoking, alcohol use, salt intake, diet and obesity. Early detection is also critically important. Some men might not be aware that they have symptoms or they might be inclined to point to 'indigestion' or 'bad circulation'. The message must be; **'if in doubt, check it out'. Talk to your GP today.**

So what do we mean by 'cardiovascular disease'? Your blood vessels (arteries and veins) and your heart are together called your cardiovascular system. Diseases that affect the cardiovascular system are called cardiovascular diseases. These include angina (chest pain), heart attacks and strokes. High blood pressure and cholesterol are two important factors that can cause a heart attack or stroke.

## Blood pressure

Everyone has blood pressure. It shows the amount of work that your heart has to do to pump blood around the body. The normal level of blood pressure is usually about 120 (systolic-when the heart muscle squeezes out the blood from the heart) over 80 (diastolic- when the heart relaxes).

### How do I know if my blood pressure is high?

A person with high blood pressure may feel well, look well and may not necessarily have any symptoms. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have it measured.

### What do I do to reduce high blood pressure?

A healthy lifestyle can help to keep down blood pressure levels.

For a healthy level of blood pressure:

- Know your blood pressure level.
- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Eat less salt and more fruit and vegetables.
- Drink less alcohol and more water.
- Be more physically active every day.
- If prescribed tablets, always take as directed.

Smoking and high blood pressure are two serious factors that can cause a heart attack or stroke. You can greatly reduce this risk by immediately stopping smoking. High blood pressure is best managed by you and your doctor.

**i** High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. If not treated or kept under control, it is one of the major risk factors for heart disease and stroke

## A Healthy Cholesterol

Having high cholesterol in your blood is one of the risk factors that increases your chances of getting heart disease and stroke. The body needs good cholesterol to produce hormones and to help digestion. 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.

### Is your cholesterol level too high?

Your cholesterol can be measured by your doctor, who knows your family history. If a family member has high cholesterol, heart disease or has had a stroke, it's really important you ask your doctor to do this test.

### How can I lower my cholesterol?

- Know your cholesterol level.
- Cut back on fried or fatty food.
- Eat more fruit and vegetables and wholegrain foods.
- Eat oily fish twice a week.
- Be more physically active every day.
- Be a healthy weight.
- Stop smoking.



## Are you on the way to a Heart Attack?

### Heart attack symptoms:

- Chest pain.
- Upper body pain, pain in the jaw, back, neck or arms.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating.
- Nausea.
- Light-headedness.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Low energy and poor stamina.
- Weakness.
- Tiredness.

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. However 10 to 15 percent of people who have a heart attack may not experience chest pain: they may just feel weak, tired or short of breath.

**i** One of the best ways to prevent heart disease and stroke is to keep your cholesterol at a healthy level



## What is a 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.

### 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:** If you see any single one of these signs.



Balbriggan sheep farmer, **ANTHONY MAGUIRE (41)**, had a heart attack while shearing sheep last May. He had two stents inserted in arteries two days after the heart attack and has had to make lifestyle changes in order to look after his heart from now on. *"I never thought I'd have a heart attack at the age of 40," he says. "Life begins at 40, they say, but it could end at it, too, if you're not careful. Don't think you're bullet-proof because you're not. I couldn't believe it when I heard the words 'heart attack'. I thought it couldn't be happening to me".* Anthony has given up cigarettes ever since and now follows a healthy lifestyle with no salt, no junk-food and lots of exercise. *"You have to make the changes like you're told – diet, exercise and so on. I've learned now not to take life for granted. Luckily I had lost three stone before the heart attack. Doctors said the outcome could have been worse if I hadn't." "I have damaged the pump of my heart and it will fix itself to a certain extent but it will never be 100% again. I know now that I can't bull into anything anymore. I won't be shearing this year, for example. I'll just have to take it easier now and take my time at jobs."* Having the heart attack has put a different light on everything, he says. *"In the past I didn't have to think about the work I was going to do, now I have to think about it and if I'll be able to do it. I get shocking tired doing things now compared to before but there's no reason I won't have a healthy life from now on if I do what I'm told and do the exercise. If I don't I'll end up back in there (in hospital) again."* Anthony now takes regular exercise, cycling one hour five nights a week to keep his heart healthy. Anthony urges farmers to have a check-up at an early age and do something to stay fit. *"Don't leave it too late, lads. It's too late when it happens," he says. "You never think it can happen to you but it can."*

### USEFUL CONTACTS

**Irish Heart Foundation**

01 6685001  
www.irishheart.ie

**Men's Health Forum Ireland**

046 928044  
www.mhfi.org

**Men's Development Network**

051 844260  
www.mens-network.net

## Cancer prevention and early detection

### Introduction

Huge progress has been made in recent years in treating cancer and in greatly improving cancer patients' chances of surviving a cancer diagnosis. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go in reducing our risk of developing the disease. Men are more at risk than women of developing cancer and of dying from cancer. While we can do little to influence risk factors associated with genetics or the environment, there is a lot we can do to reduce lifestyle risk factors such as smoking, alcohol use, diet and obesity. Because farmers work so much in the outdoors, they need to take particular care to protect themselves from the sun – simply covering up and using sun cream. Early detection is also critically important. Cancer comes in many shapes and sizes, and how it affects the body varies greatly. There are over 200 different types of cancers, each with a specific name, treatment and chance of being cured. While it is almost impossible to be aware of the signs and symptoms of every cancer, we should never ignore a change to our bodies that concerns us – this could be a recurring pain, a lump, a change to normal bodily function (e.g. in passing urine or bowel movement) or a change to a mole on our skin. Having such symptoms might be the result of any number of things – not necessarily associated with cancer. However, this should be for your GP to decide. It's not worth the worry and stress of waiting and wondering. And remember, the earlier you get to the bottom of a problem, the better.

### Three positive steps to reduce your risk of cancer

You have the power to reduce your cancer risk by one-third by eating a healthy diet, being physically active and being a healthy weight. This 3-step guide will help you achieve a healthier lifestyle that will not only reduce your risk of cancer, but leave you feeling great and with more energy.

**Step 1: Eat a healthy diet** – The types of foods you eat can help you reduce your cancer risk. Use the Food Pyramid to plan your healthy food choices every day and reduce your portion size.

**Step 2: Be physically active** – Being physically active can reduce your risk of cancer and your risk of cancer recurrence. Every little helps, but the more activity the better. It is important to accumulate 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at least five days a week through activities like jogging, cycling, taking a brisk walk, swimming, playing tennis, hiking, aerobics or aqua-aerobics. Additionally it is important to carry out resistance training 2-3 times a week to improve strength and flexibility through activities like pilates, yoga, Tai Chi, lifting weights.

**Step 3: Be a healthy weight** – Your risk of getting some cancers and other diseases increases if you are overweight or obese. Extra fat stored around your waist puts you at greater risk. Calculating your body mass index and waistline measurement will tell you if you are a healthy weight.

**i** We need to understand that sun cream is not just for when we are on holiday

## The European Code against Cancer

The European Code against Cancer outlines healthier lifestyle choices that can help you avoid certain cancers and improve your general health.

### These include:

- If you smoke, plan to quit.
- Eat at least five servings a day of a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Limit your intake of fatty foods.
- If you drink alcohol, limit your intake to no more than two standard drinks per day.
- Do brisk physical activity every day.
- Be a healthy weight.
- Protect yourself from the sun and avoid sunburn, especially in children.

See a doctor if you have persistent problems, such as an ongoing cough or hoarseness, a change in bowel or bladder habit, or unexpected weight loss.

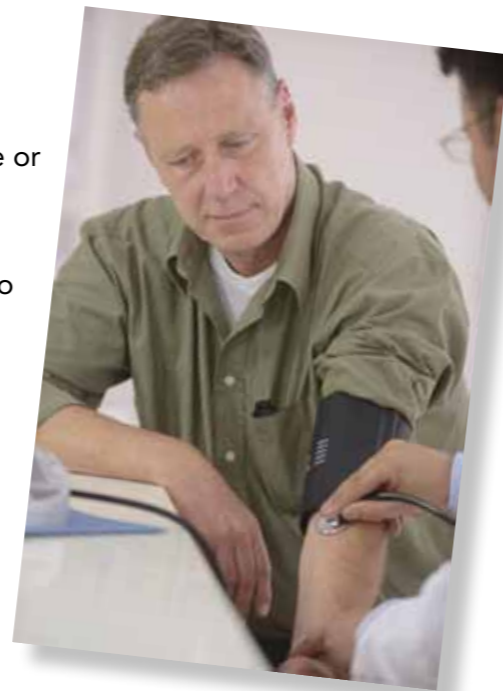
## Detecting Cancer Early

**1. Attend your GP** – Regular check-ups by your own GP can pick up potential medical problems and some GPs offer basic screening services. It is also a good opportunity to talk about any concerns you might have and check out your risks.

**2. Check your family history** – Check out your family history of cancer. If either of your parents suffered from a particular cancer check with your doctor what you can do to reduce your own risk. Remember most cancers can be successfully treated when they are caught early. Prevention is better than cure, so you should try to reduce your risks.

**3. Know your body** – Get to know your body so that you will more quickly recognise anything amiss such as: new lumps or growths; a sore or bruise that does not heal; a mole that changes in shape, size or colour or bleeds in unusual circumstances.

**4. Take action** – Many symptoms that might indicate cancer can also be caused by a less serious illness. But it is always better to be safe than sorry so go see your doctor if in any doubt.



You wouldn't think twice about calling the vet. Surely your own health is more valuable than the health of your livestock?

**DONAL CASHMAN**, former IFA president, experienced the double



whammy of prostate and bowel cancer in 1999/2000. A regular check up showed raised PSA levels (prostate specific antigen) in his blood stream.

*"I didn't feel unwell at all so only that I had the blood tests I mightn't have known until it was too late. There's no excuse for not taking care of your health."*

Eat a healthy diet, be physically active, be a healthy weight

### USEFUL CONTACTS

#### Irish Cancer Society

1800 200700  
[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

#### MAC (Men Against Cancer)

1800 200700  
[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

#### Health Promotion Unit

01 6353000  
[www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)



# Breaking isolation

## Introduction

In Ireland, isolation is a very common experience for many men especially for farmers and it can happen in different ways:

- Some farmers live alone in rural areas. There are now fewer farmers than in previous generations, with fewer young people choosing farming as a career. This has led to a decline in traditional rural communities and has contributed to isolation.
- Many farmers work alone which means it can be hard to meet and socialise with people. With the current economic climate, many farmers have suffered a loss in income which, for some, can feel that they have lost their position or status in their family or their community. This can be associated with feelings of isolation as they find it hard to deal with their new situation.
- If farmers are separated from their partners they can become isolated from their families. Also their partner might have been the only person they confided in and they have now lost that person.
- Emotional isolation is also a reality for many men who have lots of acquaintances but only have a few friends that they really talk to. Traditionally, men have been brought up to 'produce', 'provide', 'have all the answers' and 'not seek help'. When faced with challenges, many men struggle alone as they don't have someone to talk to.

**...when I was younger, I mean, you didn't talk about things, if you were upset or down or suffering in some way, you just didn't talk, at least I didn't talk about them anyway**

**Farming can be a lonely and isolating activity... some folk never venture away from the end of their lane**

Whatever the reason for your isolation, you may feel trapped by your situation. You may feel lonely and stressed which can seriously affect your mental and physical health. When you don't have anyone to share experiences with, you are at risk of becoming detached from other people and ultimately yourself.

## What can I do to break the isolation trap?

- **Join a group:** There are many groups you could join around the country from agriculture groups, discussion groups, men's groups to cycling or walking groups. These groups can help you meet like-minded people and can be really good fun.
- **Talk it over:** For some men, the 'rules of manhood' say that you don't talk, show emotion, ask for help, or appear to need anyone but yourself. Unfortunately, these 'rules' keep many men in the isolation trap. It takes courage and strength to reach out to a person you trust and to be really honest with them. Another person's experience or view may be really useful when you are dealing with a problem. You will also probably feel relieved by talking about your problem with someone. You can also talk to someone from one of the many organisations available locally that can help you.
- **You don't have to know everything and do everything yourself:** It is OK 'not to know' and 'not to do' everything yourself. You could really help yourself by asking for advice or help when you have a problem or when you need to take a break. Let yourself 'off the hook' and let someone else do it for a change!



Full-time Kells farmer and counsellor, **JIM DEVIN**, has suffered from depression himself in the past and believes in being open about it. *"I once worked with a man who was very open about his depression. That was a great example to me."*

Jim trained as a counsellor after seeing the value of it in his own recovery. *"When a person is depressed or under severe stress the confidence and the energy may have gone down,"* he says. *"They may believe that nobody can help them but counselling can help you get that power back in yourself, to*

*be able to find it within yourself to say 'I can do this' and 'I can get over this'."* Jim counsels part-time at the Acorn Counselling and Therapy Centre in Drogheda

### USEFUL CONTACTS

**Teagasc**  
0599170200  
[www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)

**Mental Health Ireland**  
01 2841166  
[www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)

**Aware**  
1890 303302  
[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

**Samaritans**  
1850 609090  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Irish Cancer Society**  
1800 200700  
[www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risk?mens-health](http://www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risk?mens-health)

## Don't wait 'til it's too late – see your doctor

### Introduction

Many men put off visiting their doctor. For some men, they think that looking for medical help is a sign of weakness or 'giving in' to a particular problem that they want to avoid. Some of the main reasons why men tend to be reluctant to go to the doctor include:

- The costs involved.
- Having to take time off work.
- Being afraid of getting bad news.
- Wanting to maintain control.
- Long waiting times.
- Not having enough time with the doctor.

*...farmers don't complain about things, do they? They just get on with it*

Unlike women, many men think that health services only deal with emergencies, surgery or sick people. Often men do not think they need to go to a doctor unless there is something obviously wrong or until a condition has deteriorated beyond a certain level – to 'being really sick'.

Even then, it's very often a man's wife or partner that will give him the final push to go to the doctor. Some would say that farmers are better at looking after their livestock than they are at looking after themselves!

Unfortunately, such delays in seeking help can often make treating a problem much more challenging and can affect how well men subsequently recover. This is true for 61-year-old Jim Carroll who suffered constant pain in the back of his legs and back for two years and began to lose his balance and mobility. His mobility became so bad that it affected how he walked and soon he began to lose his independence and it became too much for him to go out in public. It was Jim's fear of what he would find out that stopped him from going to his doctor. Jim was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. It is being treated and he has got his quality of life back.

However, Jim regrets delaying going to see his doctor and the impact that this had on his life for two years and his later recovery. So don't wait until it's too late. It takes courage to take that first step to see your doctor, and it makes a lot of sense to be proactive about your health.

*If you have the cows to milk or the corn to harvest, you say, ah sure I'll see how I'm feeling next week*

Younger men often take the view that they their bodies can put up with wear and tear indefinitely without there being any consequences in the long run – the reality is that most men end up paying the price when they are older. For farmers, this can have serious consequences for their livelihood.

You are young and headstrong and you think nothing can stop you... you don't think about it at the time... its twenty years down the line when it starts to affect you

If you have the cows to milk or the corn to harvest, you say, ah sure I'll see how I'm feeling next week

Had I gone and been treated earlier, my body function wouldn't have deteriorated as much and I wouldn't have as big a hole to climb out of as I subsequently had

...it's almost as if sickness is the enemy and robs us of our power and our strength and our ability to provide and to go to the doctor then, it's an admittance that I've failed or that I'm not strong in myself

### Preparing for your visit:

#### Go early

Try to book an appointment with your doctor when you are not very sick, or as early as you can when you are having symptoms. By being proactive you can try to deal with the development of any condition and improve your treatment options.

#### List your key health problems and worries

Sometimes you might want to talk about a number of things or have questions for your doctor. It is helpful to write these down on a list and it may also be useful for you to write down some of the advice your doctor gives you:

Write a list with:	Keep a record of:
Signs.	Your Blood Pressure reading.
Symptoms.	Your weight or Body Mass Index (BMI).
Timeline of symptoms.	Advice for you on diet and exercise.
Questions.	Advice on health supplements.
Any concerns or worries about your health.	Medication and further treatment.

Knowing your family history like illness, diseases, chronic conditions, and any details or medications or vitamins that you are taking would help your visit. Most doctors will be pleased to have a patient who takes such a proactive approach to their healthcare.

#### Tell the doctor the truth

A lot of people don't give their doctor all of the details of their symptoms or bad habits. It is very important to be honest with your doctor about how severe your symptoms or habits are so that they can make an accurate diagnosis and give you the proper treatment.

#### Doctors have heard and seen nearly everything before

There is nothing you can say or show your doctor that they haven't heard or seen before. The doctor will not judge you and they are well used to dealing with parts of the body that some of us might be shy about.

"Men traditionally haven't been good at attending doctors until 'putting out fire time..."



I think, though, when it comes to farmers, they should look at their health the same way as they look at their machinery – you wouldn't run your prized piece of machinery into the ground. Instead you would clean it and maintain it to prolong its performance for as long as possible. It's the same with your

body"

GP DR JOHN BALL, spokesperson for the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP).

GEORGE is a 61 year old farmer from County Wexford. He has been having regular check-ups since he was 40. "When my sister died very suddenly twenty years ago it spurred me on to have regular health checks. I go for check-ups now as a matter of course and I don't get uptight about them anymore. You have to bite the bullet. The way I look at it is that a stitch in time saves nine. It can be a load off your mind, too, when you have the check-up because you can be worrying about some little thing and imagining the worst but nine times out of ten there won't be anything serious wrong."

## Ten commandments to health

1. Prioritise, plan and pace yourself.
2. Take control of stress – don't let stress take control of you.
3. Eat wisely and drink water plentifully.
4. Do your best to find time for physical activity daily, build it into your day.
5. If you smoke, quit and if you drink, try to cut down.
6. Take good care of your back when lifting things, one bad lift can cause a lifetime of misery.
7. Keep close tabs on your blood pressure and cholesterol level.
8. Reduce your cancer risk by eating healthily, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight.
9. Beat isolation by joining a group or talking things through with, your partner, a friend or neighbour.
10. Visit your doctor regularly and never delay getting help if you are concerned about any change to your health.



