

Every cigarette is doing you damage!

If you are a smoker, don't put off the decision to stop any longer. Most adults and young people know that cigarettes are bad for their own health and the health of those around them. Despite this over a quarter of adults continue to smoke. Smoking among school children is also a major concern; 1 in 3 have reported smoking tobacco, most of them smoking for the first time at 12 years of age.

Nicotine is a highly addictive substance, smokers need and deserve help to stop.

Since 1999, the Health Promotion Agency has been running a public information campaign about the effects of smoking. The first two years focused on children and young people and included a TV campaign, development of a website and a school magazine. In recent years the campaign has focused on adult smokers by highlighting the damage caused by smoking. In 2003 the campaign also included a dedicated telephone helpline service.

There are no easy solutions to

tackling tobacco. Providing public information and education is very important, but that is not enough on its own. There are many good examples of activities involving statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors working together. More energy needs to be put into this kind of partnership.



A five year Tobacco Action Plan was published in June 2003. The Plan looks at ways to change public attitude towards tobacco use, preventing people from starting to smoke and protecting the public from tobacco smoke. It also identifies twenty four specific actions,

which are currently being taken forward by a multi-agency Implementation Group.

Since 1999, nearly £4 million of extra funds has been provided to develop smoking cessation services, public information and education campaigns and a telephone helpline. An integral part of this support is the provision of smoking cessation aids, such as medicines to help people when they are attempting to quit.

If you would like more information on how to stop smoking call the smokers' helpline **free on 0800 85 85 85**

Exposure to Tobacco Smoke

Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is a cause of lung cancer. One of the key elements of the Tobacco Action Plan is therefore the protection of the general public, particularly children, from tobacco smoke. For children exposure to tobacco smoke is likely to occur in the child's own home from the smoking habits of parents and siblings. For adults exposure is likely to occur in the workplace and other public places.

In Northern Ireland there is no legislative control banning smoking in public places, however, some organisations including hospitals, theatres, cinemas and some shopping malls have adopted no smoking policies. Smoking in the workplace is a particular issue as it can put employees at particular risk and aggravate certain diseases such as asthma and chronic bronchitis. The voluntary sector has made a valuable contribution to the promotion smoke-free policies, but this is not enough. More controls need to be in place to protect employees and the public generally.

Some States in America have seen a real reduction in the numbers of people smoking. This has been achieved through a range of measures including a ban in smoking in public places. The Republic of Ireland has recently announced that it will be introducing a ban on smoking in public places from 29th March 2004.

In Northern Ireland 26% of the adult population continue to smoke. Would a ban on smoking in public places realise the aim of a tobacco-free society?

Diabetes an impending epidemic

Diabetes has been coined the epidemic of the 21st century

Worldwide, the number of people with diabetes has tripled since 1985. It is on track to become a major global public health challenge for this century.

Diabetes is a disorder in which the body is unable to metabolise sugar correctly because of a lack of insulin. As a result of this, the disease can cause damage to small blood vessels throughout the body. A person with diabetes is five times more likely to die of a heart attack than a non-diabetic and three times more likely to die of a stroke. Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, accounting for more than one in six people starting dialysis treatment. It is also the second most common cause of lower limb amputation and the leading cause of blindness amongst people of working age.

There are 2 types of diabetes which together effect up to 50,000 people in Northern Ireland. The first type is Type 1, which usually develops in young people and requires regular insulin injections as a life saving treatment. The cause of Type 1 diabetes remains unclear. In Northern Ireland there has been a sharp rise in the number of cases diagnosed in children under the age of 15. Rates here are among the highest in the UK.

The second type of diabetes, Type 2, accounts for about 90% of diabetes and is clearly linked with obesity and increasing age. It can often be managed through simple weight reduction. However, with increasing levels of obesity, Type 2 diabetes is likely to become an even bigger health problem in the future.

People with Type 2 diabetes,

may have no symptoms for many years, yet damage may be occurring to many organs in the body. However the good news is that Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed in many cases by keeping your weight under control, increasing the amount of exercise you take and eating healthily. Those who already have diabetes can significantly reduce their risk of developing long-term complications by good control of their blood sugar levels and blood pressure.

In Northern Ireland recent initiatives to improve services for people with diabetes have included proposals to expand access to eye screening and increase the number of machines for kidney dialysis. Work is also ongoing to further improve the quality of services available to people with diabetes.

Who needs exercise?



We all do! Regular exercise has a very positive effect on health and wellbeing. It can, for example lower the risk of coronary heart

disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) and hip fractures. It can also help reduce stress levels and keep our weight under control.

In Northern Ireland most of us don't get enough exercise. A survey, done in the 1990s, found that 7 out of 10 men and 8 out of 10 women took less exercise than the recommended level which would make a difference to their health. It is those who

currently take little or no exercise who have most to gain from any increase in activity.

We should aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 days a week. Exercise doesn't have to involve a major workout. Try some new activities or take up some old hobbies again, like walking, dancing, cycling and swimming. If you have a health problem, check with your doctor first. But,

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remember it's never too late to start.

Walking is one of the easiest ways to exercise. It is something that most of us can do at a time that suits. You don't need any special equipment or place – just a comfortable pair of shoes and you're off. Walking a mile briskly burns up the same calories as running a mile!

Today's children and young people take less exercise than previous generations. Exercise has been replaced by watching television and playing computer games. Parents should try to build activity into their child's lifestyle so that it is part of a regular routine.



High Blood Pressure the silent killer

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is very common affecting about 1 in 3 adults. It does not usually cause any symptoms but is a major risk factor for heart attacks, heart failure and strokes.

The vast majority of people with hypertension do not have any specific underlying cause. It is thought that it develops as a result of an unhealthy lifestyle over many years. There is a very strong link between being overweight and having high blood pressure.

You can reduce your blood pressure significantly by losing weight, taking more exercise, reducing the amount of alcohol you drink and eating a healthy diet. A high intake of salt increases blood pressure. On average, people eat more than twice the amount of salt needed, 80% of which is from processed foods.

Detecting high blood pressure is important as treatment will reduce your risk of stroke and heart disease. All adults should have their blood pressure checked at least every 5 years. This can be done by your GP or practice nurse. Even if your blood pressure is raised, a diagnosis of hypertension is not usually made until there are repeated measurements over a number of months. Treatment may firstly focus on weight reduction, exercise and limiting alcohol and salt intake. If drug therapy is given, it is important that this is taken as prescribed. Treatment is usually life-long.

Only half of people with high blood pressure know it is raised. Half of those who know it is raised are not on treatment and half of the people on treatment do not have their blood pressure well controlled.

Keep your blood pressure under control

Have your blood pressure checked every 5 years

Maintain a healthy weight and diet

Limit salt and alcohol consumption

Exercise regularly

If prescribed medication, take as instructed

Breast Feeding in Northern Ireland

Breastfeeding has important health benefits for mothers and babies. Research shows that it helps to protect babies and children from infections, severe asthma and eczema, diabetes and obesity.

Mothers who breastfeed lower their risk of developing breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis (bone thinning). The longer breastfeeding continues, the better the protection for both mother and baby. These proven health benefits are the reason for ongoing efforts to increase breastfeeding rates in Northern Ireland, which, although gradually rising, are still the lowest in the UK.

Information leaflets and posters have been developed to encourage women to consider breastfeeding. Once mothers decide to breastfeed they need support and encouragement, particularly with continuing breastfeeding beyond the first

few weeks. In addition to health professionals being trained to support breastfeeding, 47 voluntary and health service breastfeeding support groups meet regularly in Northern Ireland for mother to mother support. A list of these groups can be viewed on www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/breastfeeding

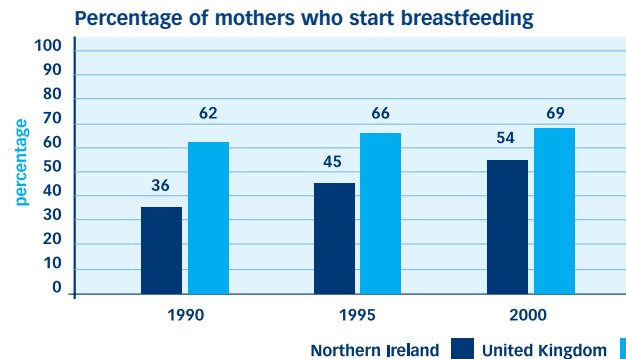
To breastfeed successfully, it is important to feed the baby as often as he or she seems hungry. However, one of the reasons why mothers choose not to breastfeed is the thought of having to do it in front of other people. Recent research in Northern Ireland found that a third of the public thought that breastfeeding was embarrassing and half thought it should always be done in private. In fact, it is possible to breastfeed very discreetly. As well as trying to convince mothers that breastfeeding is the best way to feed their baby, efforts are being



made to persuade the public that breastfeeding when babies are hungry (even though that may mean in a public place) is natural, necessary and acceptable.

Ultimately we all have a part to play in supporting and protecting breastfeeding, by ensuring those mothers who choose to breastfeed feel valued and get the best possible support to succeed.

If you would like further information on breastfeeding in Northern Ireland contact Janet Calvert, Regional Breastfeeding Coordinator on 028 9031 1611 or email j.calvert@healthpromotionagency.org.uk



Social Determinants of Health – The Solid Facts

Even in the most affluent countries, people who are less well off have substantially lower life expectancies and more illness than the rich. Health is an outcome which results from a whole range of influences in every day life. The social environment in which people live is a major determinant of their future and long-term health. Ten areas and how they can influence health are outlined below.

1. The Social Gradient

Life expectancy is shorter and most diseases are more common further down the social ladder in each society. Health policy must tackle the social and economic determinants of our health.

2. Stress

Stressful circumstances, making people feel worried, anxious and unable to cope, are damaging to

health and may lead to premature death.

3. Early life

A good start in life means supporting mothers and young children: the health impact of early development and education lasts a lifetime.

4. Social Exclusion

Life is short where its quality is poor. By causing hardship and resentment, poverty, social exclusion and discrimination costs lives.

5. Work

Stress in the workplace increases the risk of disease. People who have more control over their work have better health.

6. Unemployment

Job security increases health, wellbeing and job satisfaction. Higher rates of unemployment

cause more illness and premature death.

7. Social Support

Friendship, good social relations and strong supportive networks improve health at home, at work and in the community.

8. Addiction

Individuals turn to alcohol, drugs and tobacco and suffer from their use but use is influenced by the wider social setting.

9. Food

Because global market forces control the food supply, healthy food is a political issue.

10. Transport

Healthy transport means less driving and more walking and cycling, backed up by better public transport.

World Health Organisation 2003

Cook it!

Cook it! is a practical education programme for people who want to improve their cooking skills and who are interested in low cost healthy eating. It was developed by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland in association with the Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts.

Cook it! dieticians provide training and support for a wide range of groups and individuals in the community.

Trained tutors take classes on different aspects of healthy eating. The classes give people a

chance to get hands-on experience of food preparation and hear good advice on food hygiene.

For more information visit www.hpani.org.uk

Tips for a healthy diet

- eat a total of 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- eat more bread, cereal and potatoes
- eat or drink dairy products in moderate amounts
- avoid adding salt at the table and eat less salted foods
- avoid eating cakes, biscuits or chocolate every day
- drink 6-8 cups of fluid a day, preferably water



Food Safety your concern

Food poisoning can be a very serious condition caused by eating contaminated food. The symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea and fever. However it can be prevented by ensuring good hygiene in the kitchen.

1. Cleanliness

Hands and fingers make great havens for germs. Washing your hands before and during food preparation is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of food poisoning germs.

Also, always remember to wash your hands after handling raw meat, poultry or fish; using the toilet; gardening or handling rubbish; handling a pet or any other animal. Eating and preparation areas, as well as kitchen utensils, can all become contaminated with germs. Keep these areas clean.

2. Keep Foods Separate

Foods such as sandwiches or prepared meals may be contaminated through contact with raw meat, poultry, fish or unwashed vegetables. Store raw meat alone on the bottom shelf or drawer of the fridge so that its juices don't drop onto other food.

When at the supermarket, be sure to pack raw meat, poultry, fish or unwashed vegetables separately from other foods. Never place raw and cooked meat products in the same bag.

3. Cook Food Thoroughly

It's important to cook food right through, especially meat such as chicken. If you eat or serve undercooked food you are at risk of food poisoning. If meat is properly cooked the centre of the meat shouldn't be pink and the juices should run clear when tested with a skewer. When using a skewer, make sure it is clean each time you use it.

If you are cooking a ready-prepared meal, always make sure the food is piping hot all the way through before serving. If you are cooking a frozen ready-prepared meal, follow the instructions for cooking from frozen, or make sure it is completely thawed before cooking.

4. Store Food Carefully

It is important to store food carefully, to stop it going off or becoming contaminated.

The main things to remember are:

- keep food at the right temperature
- observe "Use by" dates
- separate raw and ready-to-eat foods

Bacteria need food, warmth and time to grow. Even one piece of food left on the counter for a couple of hours can contain millions of bacteria. Foods need to be stored in a fridge because

bacteria and viruses don't multiply below 6°C. The correct temperature for a fridge is between zero and 5°C.

Cooked leftovers should be cooled quickly and then put in the fridge within 1-2 hours. Putting food in shallow containers and dividing it into smaller amounts will speed up the cooling process.

For more information visit the Food Standards Agency website at www.food.gov.uk or The Food Safety Promotion Board at www.safefoodonline.com

