



**Irish Heart  
Foundation**

# REBOOT YOUR LIFE

**A Guide for Men on Kickstarting  
your Heart Health**



# Contents

Kickstart your motivation .....	4
What changes can you make? .....	5
Fuel up on heart-healthy foods .....	6
Get active .....	8
Other ways to improve your heart health .....	9
- Limit alcohol .....	9
- Quit smoking .....	10
- Know your numbers .....	11
- Mind your mental health .....	11



# 1 in 4 men die from heart disease and stroke

Some risk factors for heart disease, like age and gender, cannot be changed. But the good news is that...

## 80% of premature heart disease and stroke is preventable

through lifestyle factors including healthy eating, being physically active, not smoking and limiting alcohol.

Every small step you take to improve your heart health adds up. You'll also lower your risk of other diseases such as some cancers, diabetes and obesity.

If you're looking to challenge yourself to make some positive lifestyle changes for your health, this booklet is for you.



# Kickstart your motivation

Getting into the right frame of mind is essential for change. You need to feel ready and have clear reasons for making the change.

**Try answering the following questions to tap into your motivation:**

How important is my heart health to me?



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

What barriers and triggers have kept me from making changes in the past?

What have I learned from previous attempts to improve my lifestyle that can help me this time?

Do I have someone who can support me to overcome the things I find hardest to change? This can be a friend, partner, relative or health professional.

When things don't go to plan how will I get myself back on track?

# What changes can you make?

Take this quiz to help you to identify what lifestyle changes you would like to make. Reflect on your answers. What habits do you find yourself doing less often? Focusing on tackling just one or two of these areas at a time helps us to build strong heart-healthy habits.

Tick the boxes that apply to you	Regularly	Rarely
Do I eat at least five to seven portions of fruit, vegetables or salad every day? A portion is about a handful.		
Do I eat wholegrain foods like oats, wholegrain bread, or brown rice every day?		
Do I have at least two meat-free days per week and try to eat very little processed meats like ham, sausages or rashers?		
Do I include beans, nuts, lentils, peas or soya every day?		
Do I eat at least two portions of fish per week, of which one is oily, like salmon or mackerel?		
Do I choose low-fat dairy foods such as low-fat milk, yogurt and reduced fat cheese or plant-based alternatives instead of the full-fat dairy options?		
Do I try not to snack on foods and drinks high in fat, sugar or salt, such as chocolate, crisps, biscuits, cakes, pastries, sugary drinks, chips, kebabs, creamy curries, fried chicken or burgers?		
Do I break up my sitting time with regular movement breaks throughout the day?		
Do I achieve 30 minutes of physical activity at least five days per week?		
Do I feel the three signs of moderate intensity activity during my activity sessions? (Raised heart rate, increased breathing, feeling warmer)		

Now that you have identified your habits and the changes you would like to make, it's time to put that change into action with the following suggestions.

# Fuel up on heart-healthy foods

## Fuel up on fibre-rich foods

Boost your intake of fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and pulses. The benefits gained from making these nutrient-packed foods the base of your diet are truly incredible. Fill half your dinner plate with vegetables or choose high-fibre breakfast cereals and brown bread, pasta and rice.

## Get salt savvy

Most of us eat twice the amount of salt we should every day, which can raise our blood pressure. It's not just the salt that you add to your meal. In fact, 80% of the salt we eat is already in our food. Aim to cook meals at home – the more unprocessed wholefoods the better. Have patience – it can take three to six weeks for our taste buds to adjust to less salt but they will.

## Boost your heart-healthy fats

One of the most effective ways to protect your heart is to swap foods high in saturated fat for small amounts of unsaturated fat and fill up on more wholegrains and plant-based proteins.

**Saturated fats** are mainly found in fatty animal products like butter, full-fat dairy products, fatty meats, processed meat like sausages, pastries, cakes, biscuits and chocolate as well as lard, ghee, suet. Coconut oil is also a saturated fat.

**Unsaturated fats** are found in plant foods like olives, avocados, nuts and seeds; in plant-based oils and spreads like olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oil and in oily fish.

## Leaner meat and more plant proteins

Try to keep red meat to twice a week and limit your intake of processed meats such as sausages and rashers as much as possible. Replace some meat with tinned chickpeas, beans or lentils.

## Food high in fat, salt and/or sugar

Cutting down on biscuits, cakes, pastries, chocolate, crisps and takeaways helps reduce our cholesterol and maintain a healthy weight.

Try to understand the underlying trigger for snacking on these foods – is it hunger, stress, boredom, or just habit?

If you're hungry between meals, try nourishing snacks like fruit, unsalted nuts, plain popcorn, low fat yogurt, or hummus with carrot sticks.

Visit [irishheart.ie](http://irishheart.ie) for more information, tips and recipes.



# Get active

Regular physical activity helps reduce blood pressure, cholesterol and helps us manage our weight. To keep our heart healthy, all adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity movement each week.

Our body uses three key signs to tell us when we are at moderate intensity

- Heart rate raises
- Breathing increases
- We feel warmer

Moderate intensity movement should feel a little bit challenging and can include brisk walking, running, swimming, cycling or playing sports.

## Keep moving

Even if we get the recommended 150 minutes of moderate intensity movement each week but spend a lot of time sitting down, we could still be putting our heart health at risk. Reducing the amount of time we spend sitting each day can help reduce our risk of heart disease and stroke.

## Tips for staying active

- Plan activities throughout the week and schedule them in your calendar
- Get active with friends, family or colleagues to help keep you motivated
- Switch to an active commute like walking or cycling
- If you work in a sedentary job, set reminders to move regularly
- Take the stairs instead of the lift
- If you travel by bus or train, get off a stop early
- Look for opportunities to get active in your community like parkrun or join a group or team

For more information and videos on how to increase your physical activity, visit [irishheart.ie](http://irishheart.ie)



# Other ways to improve your heart health

## Limit alcohol

Drinking a lot of alcohol can increase your blood pressure and may damage the liver and heart. High blood pressure is the top risk for stroke. Drinking less alcohol is just one of the ways you can reduce your risk.

If you do drink, keep within the recommended limits. For men, the recommended maximum limit is 17 standard drinks per week. Spread your drinking over the week and keep some days alcohol-free.

## What is a standard drink?

A standard drink is a specific quantity, based on it containing 10 grams of alcohol.

**1 pint =  
2 standard drinks**



**1 spirit (pub single  
measure) =  
1 standard drink**



**Typical standard  
glass of wine (250ml) =  
2.5 standard drinks**

**1 bottle of wine  
(750ml) =  
7 standard drinks**

## Examine your drinking habits

The Self-Assessment Tool on the HSE's AskAboutAlcohol.ie website is designed to help people understand more about the impact their drinking is having on their lives. The feedback can help you understand whether your habits fall within the low-risk area, or whether you need to make a change.

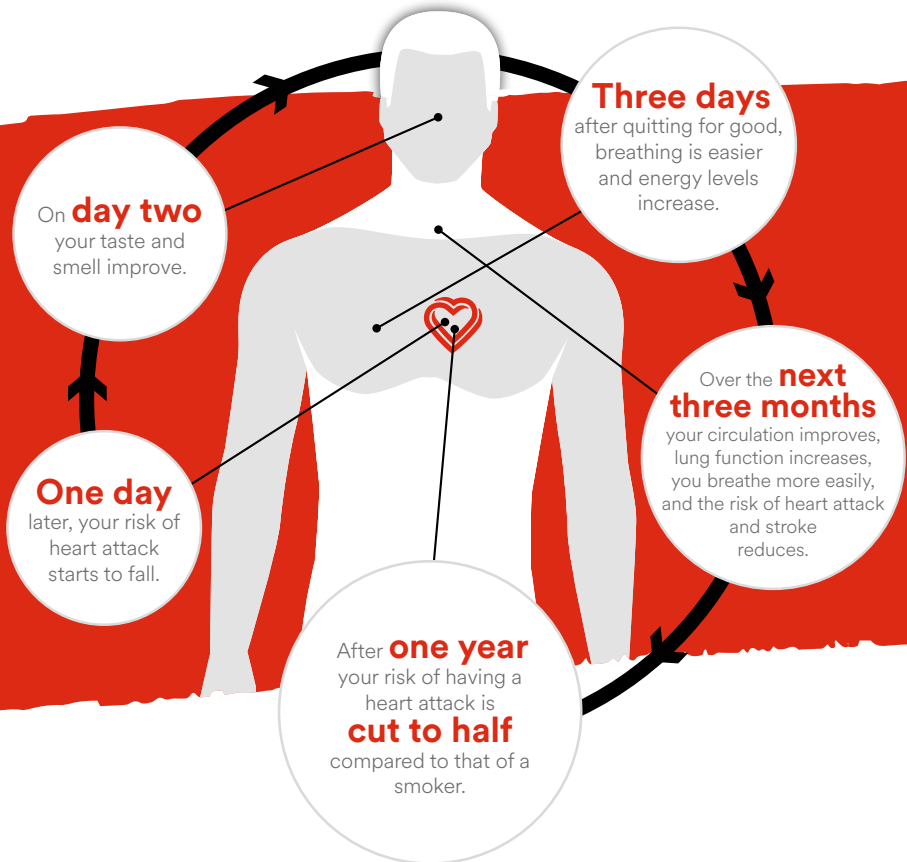
## Quit smoking

If you are a smoker stopping is the single most important step you can take to live longer, and it reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke.

People who smoke are two to four times more likely to develop heart disease and stroke.

### Quitting smoking - why and how?

The good news is it's never too late to quit smoking and it doesn't take long to see the benefits.



Make sure you have the correct support so that you are set up to succeed.

**Ask for advice.** Freephone the National Smokers' Quitline  
**1800 201 203** or visit **www.QUIT.ie**

## Know your numbers

If your blood pressure is high, it means your heart must work extra hard to pump blood around your body. In turn this can cause a heart attack or stroke. A high cholesterol can cause your blood vessels to get blocked, causing a heart attack.

You can have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, even if you're young. The only way to find out is to get checked with your GP or local community pharmacy. You will probably feel well and look well – that's why it's so important to know your numbers. If you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, there are effective treatments available.

You can get advice, support and information on the Irish Heart Foundation Nurse Support line by phoning **01 668 5001** or by emailing **support@irishheart.ie**

## Mind your mental health

For many, the Covid-19 pandemic has meant adapting to a new way of life. Research has shown that many people have reported feelings of loneliness, stress, and anxiety. It is completely normal to feel worried and stressed, however, it is vitally important to mind your mental health. If you are struggling, it's important that you seek help by contacting your GP.

**[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)**






# irishheart.ie

The Irish Heart Foundation is Ireland's national charity fighting heart disease and stroke through advocacy, research, prevention and care.



Irish Heart Foundation  
17-19 Rathmines Road Lower, Dublin 6, D06 C780

Registered Charity CHY 5507. Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20008376

 01 668 5001  
 01 668 5896  
 [info@irishheart.ie](mailto:info@irishheart.ie)

Follow us on

