Healthy living for *men*

Getting to the heart of the matter

- Eating well
- Getting physical
- Coping with stress
- Thinking about drinking
- Stopping smoking
- Avoiding men's cancers
- Keeping healthy in the sun
- Sex matters
Healthy living for men

Are you male?
Aged 25–40?
Do you ever think about your health?

If your answers to these questions are yes, then this leaflet is for you.

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Starting out

The first step on the path to better health is to care about yourself – something that many men can find difficult to do. Why is this?

Men are often brought up believing it’s a good thing to be tough. They soon learn that they’re expected to put on a brave face and hide their feelings – even if this means ignoring their own pain.

Young men often carry this attitude to their health and well-being into their adult lives. On top of this, some men feel that they can’t afford to be ill because of work pressures, family commitments or money worries, or sometimes because admitting that they’re ill might be seen as a sign of weakness.

Perhaps you’re one of the four in five men who admits to putting off a visit to your GP when you’re not feeling well? If so, this might be because you just don’t seem to have the time, or because you feel that your problems are trivial.

Whatever the reason, now might be a good opportunity to start looking after yourself by making sure you visit your GP whenever you’re concerned about your health. Why not take advantage of a health check, available from your GP?

The fact that you’re reading this leaflet means that you’ve already taken the first positive step. So let’s look at some ways you can improve your chances of living a healthy and long life...
Getting to the heart of the matter

Ticking away at the heart of your body is a pump you should be proud of: your heart. It’s in action 24 hours a day, continuously circulating blood around your body. In return, it should only require some routine maintenance.

The main ways to look after your heart are:

- giving up smoking
- eating a healthy, balanced diet
- keeping physically active
- controlling your weight
- drinking sensibly.

Heart disease kills more than one in four men in Britain, but the good news is that it can be avoided. In fact, there’s been a substantial fall in the number of deaths from heart disease in England and Wales over the past 20 years, especially for men under the age of 45. However, too many men still take their heart’s health for granted.

There’s no magic to keeping your heart healthy. Broadly speaking, the more care you take now, the better your chances of avoiding problems later.

Don’t be fooled into thinking that because something doesn’t hurt, it’s not serious. Remember, you won’t always feel pain to tell you something is wrong.

If you’re worried about heart disease, perhaps because you have a parent, brother or sister who has had a heart attack, try to find time for a health check with your GP and get your blood pressure measured.
A good diet is an important part of a healthy life. But a healthy diet doesn't mean cutting out all your favourite foods, it's about changing the proportions of the different foods you eat. For most people, the move towards healthy eating means eating more starchy foods such as bread, breakfast cereals, potatoes, pasta and rice, and more fruit and vegetables.

Above all, aim for variety in your food. Use the Balance of Good Health plate (below) to help you to choose foods from each of the five groups in the proportions shown.

The Balance of Good Health

Don't feel that you need to change all your eating habits at once. Try introducing a few small changes that you find easy and practical, and gradually build up.

Think about:

- Eating more starchy foods (such as bread, other cereals and potatoes) and choosing high fibre varieties whenever possible.
- Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily (see the box below).
- Eating fish at least twice weekly, including some oily fish such as sardines, herrings, mackerel or salmon.
- Reducing the amount of fat you eat, particularly saturated fat (which is mostly found in animal products such as hard cheeses, butter, animal fat, sausages and burgers).
- Eating foods containing sugar less frequently and sticking to small amounts.
- Reducing the amount of salt you eat.

What is a ‘portion’ of fruit and vegetables?

ONE PORTION = any of the following:
- One apple, banana or citrus fruit
- Two plums or similar sized fruit
- One glass (150ml) or more of fruit juice
- Two tablespoonfuls of vegetables (raw, cooked, frozen or canned)
- One dessert bowlful of salad.
“Nearly 2 out of 3 men are overweight”

Size isn’t everything but...

In addition to having a look at the balance of your diet, perhaps it’s time to consider how much you’re eating.

Have a look at the height/weight chart below to give you some idea of what a healthy weight is for your height. If you think you might be overweight – and nearly two-thirds of men are – why not get your weight measured as part of a health check with your GP or at work?

A combination of healthy eating, physical activity (see next page) and sensible drinking (see page 14) is the best way to get your body into shape.

The height/weight chart

Getting physical

Living an active life will help you look and feel better. As well as being a “first-line” defence against heart problems and high blood pressure, physical activity will help protect you against diabetes, obesity and depression.

In addition, living an active life can give you:

- more energy
- greater stamina
- stronger, more toned muscles
- better posture
- improved confidence.

“Just under 1/3 of all cases of coronary heart disease and 1/4 of strokes could be avoided by men if they were regularly active at a moderate level”

Gain without pain

Some men already do hard physical work such as labouring or carrying heavy loads. Others may want to fit more activity into their lives.

If you don’t do much in the way of regular physical activity – and 60% of men don’t – perhaps you could try to find a way to build up the amount you do.