



Bord Iascaigh Mhara

# Fisherman's Health Manual



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AT SEA

EARS, EYES,  
AND MOUTH

DRINK, DRUGS  
AND CIGARETTES

MENTAL  
HEALTH

EAT WELL TO  
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PROSTATE AND  
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## Foreword

Bord Iascaigh Mhara, BIM, Ireland's Seafood Development Agency, works closely with the Irish fishing industry on all aspects of crew training, from deckhands to engineers. Our range of courses include sea survival, medical care aboard ship and firefighting and fire prevention. What many of these courses have in common is providing you with the necessary training to keep yourself and your fellow crew members safe. Your personal health is an important extension of this safety message. Looking after your physical and mental health is just as important as wearing a correctly fitted Personal Floatation Device (PFD) or ensuring you have your safety training up to date.

When out at sea, your health and wellbeing is crucial to you and your team to keep everyone safe and ensure a successful trip.

The purpose of this updated BIM's Fisherman's Health Manual is to give practical advice to fishermen in Ireland on ways to stay healthy and well. I would like to acknowledge the inputs from Niamh Hannan, Chartered Psychologist and Dr Nuala Cavanagh, GP & programme lead for Medical Care Aboard Ship, National Fisheries College, Greencastle.

While this manual is not a substitute for professional medical advice, it does provide you with important signposting, should you want to get further help on a physical or mental health issue.

Safe and healthy passage to all.

Sincerely,

**Caroline Bocquel, CEO, BIM**  
June 2024



## Introduction

Fishing is a demanding job, both mentally and physically. The work is carried out in a challenging and often unforgiving environment where small mistakes can have serious consequences.

This booklet is for you and your crew, the people who do this demanding work in this difficult environment.

It is designed to help you look after your health and wellbeing by guiding you through the risks to your health, helping you identify those risks, and offering solutions to deal with those risks.

It describes the actions you can take to reduce your risk of getting certain illnesses and improve your chances of staying well and healthy.

Some are as simple as going for an eye test or a hearing test. Others are changes to your diet, alcohol consumption or exercise habits.

This booklet acknowledges that healthy choices can be difficult for people who work long, irregular hours in challenging situations. It also accepts that in your line of work, it can be more difficult to get to the doctor, dentist or optician when you need to. But taking the actions suggested here, which include getting medical and other professional help when needed, will assist you in staying healthy.

Not all threats to your health come from lifestyle. Common illnesses and conditions can affect anyone at any time. It's important to know the signs so you can seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Physical health is only half the story — it's just as important to take care of your mental health. Chapter four deals with stress and depression, explaining what they are, how to spot the signs, and what to do about them.

Finally, there is help out there. A list of services — professional and voluntary — that you can call on is included towards the end of this booklet.

This is your manual for health at sea, home or port. Keep the link to it handy or a hard copy of it in the wheelhouse, galley, your kit bag or home — and read it.



# 1 At Sea

Deaths at sea have reduced over the years due to both improved safety and mandatory safety training.

Wearing a correctly fitted Personal Floatation Device (PFD) is essential to increase your chances of surviving an incident at sea. Similarly, undergoing sea survival training is vital for anyone working at sea. BIM offers the training you need to stay safe. For more information or the current training schedule, see [www.bim.ie](http://www.bim.ie)

For information on the most appropriate lifejacket for you, check out the RNLI guides at <https://rnli.org/safety/lifejackets>

## Infections

When it comes to injury and infections, fishermen's hands normally fare worst which is not surprising considering how hard they work. Between broken ends of warps, knife cuts and crushed fingers, infections are almost inevitable. Worse still, hand injury and infection can lead to accidents.

Protective gloves are essential and all infections should be treated quickly.

You can help prevent infection by:

- Regular hand washing with soap and water
- Keeping skin clean and well moisturised
- Cleaning any cuts and wounds and using antiseptic cream

### Action points

- Check it out in ‘The Ship Captain’s Medical Guide’.
- Refer to your BIM ‘Guide to Basic First Aid’ and check the Irish Red Cross ‘First Aid Manual’.
- Get advice about antibiotic treatment if your skin is painful, hot and swollen.

Prevention is the best approach — and the good news is, you can get immunised against a number of infections:

### Tetanus

Before immunisation this deadly infection was a serious threat to fishermen. It attacks through the skin or open wound and travels up to the brain. Muscles are paralysed on the way (hence ‘lockjaw’ when it reaches the face). It can be treated, but only if caught early.

The tetanus vaccine has been given as part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in Ireland for many years.

But you may need a tetanus vaccine or booster if you have not been fully vaccinated (five doses in total), or if you’re not sure about your vaccination history.

Get advice and a booster jab if you need it.

### Hepatitis A vaccine

Hepatitis A is a common infection in many of the hotter regions of the world. This infection, which affects the liver, is usually contracted through contaminated food and water.

The vaccine is especially important for engineers who are working with shipboard sewage systems.

Two vaccines, given six months apart, are required, providing cover for up to 25 years.

### Flu

Flu will often get better on its own, but it can make some people seriously ill. It’s important to get the flu vaccine if you’re advised to. Remember, flu viruses change every year so last year’s protection is won’t protect you against this year’s flu.

If you have flu, there are some things you can do to help get better more quickly.

- Rest and sleep
- Keep warm
- Take paracetamol to lower your temperature and treat your aches and pains
- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration (your urine should be clear or light yellow)

### COVID-19

Most people with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms and feel better within a few weeks. Keeping up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines is the best way to protect yourself and others from serious illness from COVID-19.

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19 and feel unwell, you should:

- Stay at home/ in your cabin until 48 hours after your symptoms are mostly or fully gone.
- Avoid contact with other people, especially people at higher risk from COVID-19.
- And don’t forget to wash your hands with soap and water regularly throughout the day.

### Immunisations for Tropical Travel:

Vaccination will depend on where you’re travelling to. It will also be job specific and for employers and seafarers to decide.

Find out more on the National Immunisation Office Website at [www.immunisation.ie](http://www.immunisation.ie)

Or at [www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-protection-immunisation](http://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-protection-immunisation)

## Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland with over 13,000 new cases diagnosed every year. It is expected that this number will double by 2040. Outdoor workers are identified as a high risk group for the development of skin cancer. This is because they can be exposed to between 2-3 times more solar UV radiation than indoor workers — exposure is particularly intense for those working on or near water.

Even cloudy days can deliver 90% of the dangerous cancer forming UV rays.

Skin damage remains after your sunburn fades. It builds up under the skin just like rust under deck paint and it can come back to haunt you in later years.

There are basically two types of skin cancer:

### Non-melanoma (most common)

Remember: check your skin regularly – early detection and treatment offers an excellent chance of a cure for most skin cancers

It may help to take photographs of your skin and compare any changes that occur over time.

If you notice anything unusual or something that does not go away **after a month**, have it checked by your GP

### Malignant melanoma

The most serious form of skin cancer. Although it is much less common, it is on the increase. It most often appears as a changing mole or freckle.



**13,000**

**Cases of Skin Cancer**  
diagnosed every year



**Outdoor workers are identified as a high risk group**

for the development of skin cancer  
[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) (Irish Cancer Society)



**Even cloudy days can deliver 90%**  
of the dangerous cancer forming UV rays

Watch out for:

- Size: bigger than the butt end of a pencil (more than 6mm/quarter inch diameter).
- Colour variety: shades of tan, brown black and sometimes red, blue or white.
- Shape: ragged or scalloped edge and one half unlike the other.
- Itchiness.
- Bleeding.

### Action Points

- Use sunscreen with SPF minimum 30 UVA protection 20 minutes before going outside.
- Re-apply every two hours, or more often if you are perspiring.
- Look at your moles and watch out for changes in them.
- Many skin changes are harmless but a quick check with your doctor can save your skin.
- Seek shade.
- Wear clothes made from closely woven fabric.
- Wear a hat.
- Wrap on sunglasses can protect your eyes.

## Back and neck injuries

Back and neck injuries are often caused by the conditions associated with particular activities at sea. These include holding a constant position, especially when sailing or setting nets for small vessels, repeated bending or twisting in handling gear and fish, and working in an awkward position in relation to the slope of the deck or viewing angle.

There are a few simple exercises to counteract these conditions that can be done by all the crew:

- In the standing position put your hands on your hips and arch backwards as far as you are able. Do this 10 times.
- If you have space, lie face-down and do a similar movement, using your hands to lift your shoulders off the floor.

- Stand against a wall and try to get your head back against the wall. Then see if you can get the back of your neck flat too.

If you are always standing sideways on a slope (for example, at the gutting table), either try to change sides after each haul, or move your hips sideways in the opposite direction to counteract the slope before and after gutting.

### Manual handling

Manual handling codes are difficult to follow at sea. The manual handling book often states: lift between two people on a flat, stable, non-slippery surface.

If possible keep to safe handling techniques, lifting within your levels of ability. Often, however, it is the smallest weight or a trivial movement that turns out to be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

What you were doing before you lifted may be a damaging factor, i.e. long term bending or sitting. So before you lift, do a few of the back arching movements to give your back a chance.

### Slips, Trips and Falls

The risk factors are generally obvious: ladders, confined spaces, equipment, water, fish slime and darkness.

After any initial first aid treatment, remember RICE: Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation. A visit to a physiotherapist when you get ashore may well get you moving and pain-free faster.

### Sleeping positions

'Somewhere to sleep' may be the net hold or just on deck. Those with the luxury of bunks have a better chance of a few hours of sleep. But the bunks are often smaller than beds at home. Wherever you sleep, before you head off on deck again give yourself a stretch out with your hands on your hips and bend backwards a few times.

### Action points

- Try to reduce the pressure on your spine when lying down. It can help to lie sideways with your legs slightly bent and with a cushion between them.
- Spasm and tension respond well to gentle back massage.
- Roll over or even stand up and walk for a few steps.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs) and painkillers (for example, ibuprofen and paracetamol) can really help, but check out the instructions on the packet.
- Warm towels and cool compresses help relax muscles.
- Early physiotherapy after a back injury can get you back to work and doing the things you enjoy quicker. Find a qualified physiotherapist near you on the website of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists, [www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie)

# 2 Ears, Eyes, and Mouth

## Introduction

Hearing loss, eyesight deterioration and tooth pain can happen to anyone. But they pose particular problems when you're at sea. Apart from the discomfort you might feel, poor eyesight or poor hearing, if untreated, pose an increased risk of accidents. That is why it is important to be checked out by specialists if you notice your eyesight or hearing getting worse, and to see a dentist once a year.

## Ears

It is estimated that one in 12 of the adult population in Ireland have a significant hearing loss. While hearing deteriorates with age, it can also be damaged in people who are exposed to high levels of noise over a long period. We know that commercial fishing is a noisy business, and worse still, it's noisy most of the time. That means that you are at a higher risk of noise-induced hearing loss than people who work in quieter work environments such as offices.

Apart from affecting your ability to take part in conversations, enjoy music and other entertainment, hearing loss can contribute to accidents at work.

But you can take steps to protect your hearing and get help if needed.

## Action points

- Wear ear protectors when appropriate.
- Let your ears rest after being exposed to unavoidable noise.
- Get your hearing tested if you notice your hearing is getting worse — for example, are you constantly asking people to repeat themselves, or are you turning up the TV volume more than you used to? Specsavers and Hidden Hearing offer free hearing tests — make an appointment if you think your hearing is getting worse.
- Do not stick anything in your ear.



If you do wear a hearing aid, remember to carry spare batteries with you. You also need to be able to wake up in an emergency so you may need to wear it at night. Most are water resistant but remember to tell your provider where you work and ask for hearing aids that are resistant to salt water.

## Eyes

While glasses and contact lenses may provide the solution for most naturally-occurring reduced vision, it's important to prevent and know how to deal with injuries, infections and eye diseases which can also lead to loss of vision.

### Eye injury

The surface of the eye is vulnerable to damage by foreign bodies or by irritating substances. Where appropriate, wear protective glasses, goggles or a face shield. If something does get into your eye, immediate irrigation with lots of water will often wash out foreign bodies and is essential for severe irritants.

Foreign bodies may also be removed directly (see 'The Ship Captain's Medical Guide', the BIM 'Guide to Basic First Aid' or the Irish Red Cross 'First Aid Manual').

#### Action Points

- Wear the right protective gear when handling tools.
- Consult 'The Ship Captain's Medical Guide', the BIM 'Guide to Basic First Aid', or the Irish Red Cross 'First Aid Manual' for first aid advice after an eye injury.

### Infection

Eye infections are common and can cause redness, pain, itchiness and intermittent blurring of vision from pus. Conjunctivitis (infection of the surface of the eye) can be passed on to other people, so wash your hands regularly with warm soapy water and use your own towel. Ask your pharmacist for antibiotic drops or cream.

### Glaucoma, Cataracts and Vision Impairment

As well as testing to see if you need glasses or contact lenses, your optician can also test for common eye conditions which, if left untreated, can seriously damage your sight.

Glaucoma, for example, is caused by pressure building up inside the eye. It is passed down in the family so it's important to ask the optician to test you for it before it becomes a problem for you. Some forms of glaucoma cause severe eye pain and halos around lights — these require urgent treatment to prevent you from going blind.

Cataracts are another cause of impaired vision that become more common with age. Again, your optician can test you and refer you for treatment.

As we age, our eyes frequently develop problems. Some people lose distance vision, others lose near vision. For some of us such difficulties are there throughout life and can normally be corrected by the use of glasses or lenses. See an optician if you find you are having problems. This is important, as defective vision may mean you are no longer fit to do lookout duties.

## Mouth

A toothache or gum infection is painful at any time, but a lot worse if you're at sea with no access to a dentist in sight. An annual check-up with a dentist can head off many problems and ensure you get treatment when you need it.

### Tooth decay and gum disease

Sugary foods and drinks feed the plaque bacteria that live naturally in the mouth. The bacteria then make acid which attacks the tooth enamel causing tooth decay. The bacteria also irritate the gums which can cause gum disease. Most older people who lose their teeth do so because of gum disease. Smoking also causes gum disease. You can take steps to prevent problems.

#### Action points

- Brush your teeth and gums every night and morning with a fluoride toothpaste. And spit but don't rinse to keep the fluoride working.
- Try to keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes only. Choose healthier snacks between meals such as fruit and vegetables.
- Visit a dentist at least once a year.

**Mouth cancer**

Men are more likely than women to get cancer of the mouth, lips or throat. Most of these cancers are caused by smoking (or chewing tobacco) and excessive alcohol intake.

Watch out for any white or red patches, an ulcer or lump (which may not be painful), which does not go away within two weeks.

Early diagnosis is critical – go and see your doctor or dentist as soon as possible if you notice any of these symptoms.

# 3 Drink, Drugs and Cigarettes

Having a drink with your mates, with a meal or watching TV is part of most people's lives. So far, no problem. It's when too much alcohol is consumed that the problems start. So how much is 'too much'?



**The Low-Risk Weekly Alcohol Guidelines for Adults** ([drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie)):

- **Men:** Less than 17 standard drinks (170g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least two alcohol-free days
- **Women:** Less than 11 standard drinks (110g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least two alcohol-free days

It is best to space any drinking out over the week as this gives your body a break and time to recover.

If you regularly drink more than 24 standard drinks a week you are probably already experiencing things like feeling tired or depressed, putting on weight, memory loss, sleeping badly and having sexual problems. You could also suffer from high blood pressure.

If you're drunk or hung over at sea you are potentially a risk to everyone on the boat. Some people are argumentative if they drink a lot, even when they are sober, and that's not what you or your colleagues need on a small vessel with the weather closing in.

 <b>Men</b> <b>&lt;17</b> standard drinks (170g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least <b>2</b> alcohol-free days	 <b>Women</b> <b>&lt;11</b> standard drinks (110g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least <b>2</b> alcohol-free days
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**True or False?**

One pint of beer is cleared out of the body each hour

- **False:** Like beer strength, people vary enormously when it comes to their system's ability to clear alcohol. It gets longer as the alcohol builds up with heavy drinking.

Tomorrow is another day...

- **False:** Alcohol in large amounts has a lasting impression. You can still be way over the limit for driving despite sleeping for eight solid hours. Worse still, your judgment is also suspect, not a good situation if you're dealing with heavy machinery.

**Tips for less harmful drinking**

- Drink plenty of water, both during the day and when drinking alcohol.
- Try alcohol free beers between pints, you probably won't notice the difference!
- Swapping beer strengths doesn't mean losing the taste.
- Try to have at least two alcohol free days a week.

**Drugs**

Anything which clouds your judgment or concentration can make you a hazard to your vessel, its crew and yourself. Most recreational drugs will continue to affect you well after the 'buzz' has gone.

There are many different types of recreational drugs, each with their own facts, issues and risks, too many to cover in this guide. For frank, confidential information from friendly people who are professionally trained to give straight up, unbiased information about drugs, ring the Health Service Executive's (HSE) national helpline on 1800 459 459, or check out [drugs.ie](http://drugs.ie)

The lines are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5.30pm. Both the helpline and website also give confidential information and support for those worried about a friend or family member.

## Smoking

Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body. It is the greatest cause of bronchitis, emphysema, heart disease, lung cancer, and cancer in other organs.

One in two all long-term smokers will die early as a result of smoking — half of these in middle age. Smoking is also linked to erection problems.

Stopping smoking is the single most important step you can take to live longer. It greatly reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke, and the damage smoking does starts reducing very quickly.

It is never too late to quit smoking. The benefits happen immediately.

### The instant good news:

- 20 minutes after you quit smoking your blood pressure and pulse return to normal.
- One day later, your risk of heart attack starts to fall.
- Day two, your taste and smell improves.
- Three days after quitting for good, breathing is easier and energy levels increase.

### The future good news:

- Over the next three months your circulation improves, lung function increases, you breathe more easily and the risk of heart attack and stroke reduces.
- After one year your risk of having a heart attack is cut to half that of a smoker.
- Within 15 years, you will have about the same risk of heart attack and stroke as that of a non-smoker.

Preparing to stop smoking is about being practical and having a plan.

Thousands of people stop smoking for good every day, and you can, too. If you and your shipmates all give up at the same time you can support each other.

For expert help: freephone the National Smokers' Quitline on 1800 201 203 or visit [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) or freetext QUIT to 50100.

This is a free service where trained experts will help you. You can talk to an adviser, share your experience as part of a group or sign up to your Quit Plan on [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie). You are twice as likely to quit successfully with the free, proven Quit service.

You can use nicotine replacement products such as patches, gum and inhalators to cope with your withdrawal symptoms and cravings. This makes you four times as likely to succeed.

Your pharmacist can advise you on nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products. Always read the instructions and use as directed.



**20 minutes**

after you quit smoking

your blood pressure and pulse return to normal



**One day later**

your risk of heart attack starts to fall



**Day two**

your taste and smell improves



**Three days**

after quitting for good, breathing is easier and energy levels increase



**Be aware:**

- Light or low-tar cigarettes or cigars are not an alternative to quitting smoking. Smokers who switch to light or low-tar cigarette brands breathe in more deeply and do not reduce their risk.
- Cigars contain high levels of carbon monoxide, which reduces the amount of oxygen the blood can carry, so they increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Vaping - electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery-powered devices which heat nicotine mixed with flavourings and other chemicals to create an aerosol that the user inhales.
- Compared to cigarettes, vaping may be less harmful. But vaping is not harm-free. We do not know the long-term health impact of vaping.
- The best thing you can do for your health is not to smoke or vape.

# 4 Mental Health

## Stress

Life without stress is impossible, and a small amount of stress can be good for you, but a build-up of pressure can lead to a dangerous amount of stress. This can damage your health and even affect the people around you. Being at sea comes with its own stresses, such as the demanding repetitive tasks, fatigue, adverse weather conditions, the cramped and dangerous environment and being away from loved ones.

### Stress signals

Although we all have to deal with stress, people vary in how much stress they can deal with before it has an effect on their life. Watch out for common stress signals in yourself and in others including:

- Eating more or less than normal.
- Mood swings, irritability or not caring.
- Not being able to concentrate.
- Feeling tense.
- Feeling useless.
- Feeling worried or nervous.
- Not sleeping properly.
- Being tired or forgetful.

Part of the problem is not recognising our own stress signals. Another part is expecting too much of ourselves. It is important to remember that stress is **not** a sign of weakness. Recognising the symptoms of stress and taking action could help keep you and others safe and healthy.

### Why bother?

Stress can trigger anxiety, depression and physical symptoms such as:

- Back pain
- Indigestion
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Migraine
- Tension Headaches

There are several things you can do to help yourself and improve how you feel physically and mentally:

### 1. Time Out

It can be hard to cope when you are feeling very stressed, which is why it is important to take time out.

#### Quick fix

Getting yourself out of a stressful situation, even for a few moments, can give you the space you need to feel ready to tackle the problem.

#### Long-term

If possible, plan (and take!) a proper holiday in a quiet period of the year.

### 2. Chill Out

Getting enough sleep will relax your mind and help you cope with stress.

#### Quick fix

Simple relaxation techniques like breathing deeply can be an effective way of helping you deal with stress.

#### Long-term

Try to get a good night's sleep when you're back on land. Avoid sleeping tablets as they can be addictive and make things even worse.

### 3. Leave it out

Avoid smoking, junk food and alcohol. These won't help your stress levels. Go easy on drinks that contain a lot of caffeine which can make you feel anxious.

#### Quick fix

Drink plenty of water. This will help you concentrate and may stop you getting stress headaches.

#### Long-term

Improving your diet will help your body to deal with stress. It's important to make time for proper meals. Talk during meals, as this is a time to relax as well as eat.

#### 4. Talk it out

Just talking about things that are making you stressed may help you see things differently.

##### Talk to your friends or family

Dealing with stress alone is never a good idea. Talking to even one other person can help you deal with stress, and family or friends may be able to help you.

##### Talk with a health professional

You can speak to a doctor or practice nurse for advice and support, or contact [Aware.ie](http://Aware.ie) – 1800 48 48 48.

##### Other services

If you need a confidential ‘listening ear’, you can also contact:

- The Mission to Seafarers Ireland, Revd Willie Black Mobile: 086 150 3747
- Stella Maris

#### Depression

Everyone feels miserable and down at some time but this is different from true depression where nothing seems to lift the feeling of despair. It is difficult for other people to realise what you are going through. Some may ignore it or make unhelpful suggestions such as ‘pull yourself together’ or ‘snap out of it’ as if it’s your own fault. Worse still, this can be exactly what you are thinking as well.

Depression may come in two forms:

“Great time to lose my job. I am depressed”.

- You are reacting to bad news but a new job stops the feeling of misery. This is normal.

“Just won twenty thousand on the Lottery, why do I feel so sad?”

- True depression keeps you down even when things are going well. This needs help from your doctor. Modern treatments really do work.

A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one. You will not be wasting anyone’s time seeking help. If you are feeling so low that you do not feel that you can keep yourself safe (feeling as though life just isn’t worth living ) then see your GP, ring the Samaritans or call Pieta house.

# 5 Eat Well to Keep Well

A well-balanced diet can seriously improve your health by keeping your weight down, lowering your blood cholesterol and preventing high blood pressure.

All of these lower your risk of getting heart disease.

A healthy diet consists of:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables - aim to eat 5 to 7 portions a day which can include fresh, frozen or tinned.
- Plenty of wholegrains such as wholemeal cereals, breads, pasta, rice and potatoes at each meal.
- Moderate amounts of low-fat milk and dairy products.
- Some meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts. Choose lean meat, poultry (without skin) and fish. Eat oily fish up to twice a week.
- Choose eggs, beans and nuts.
- Limit processed salty meats such as sausages, bacon and ham.

Top Tips for a healthy diet

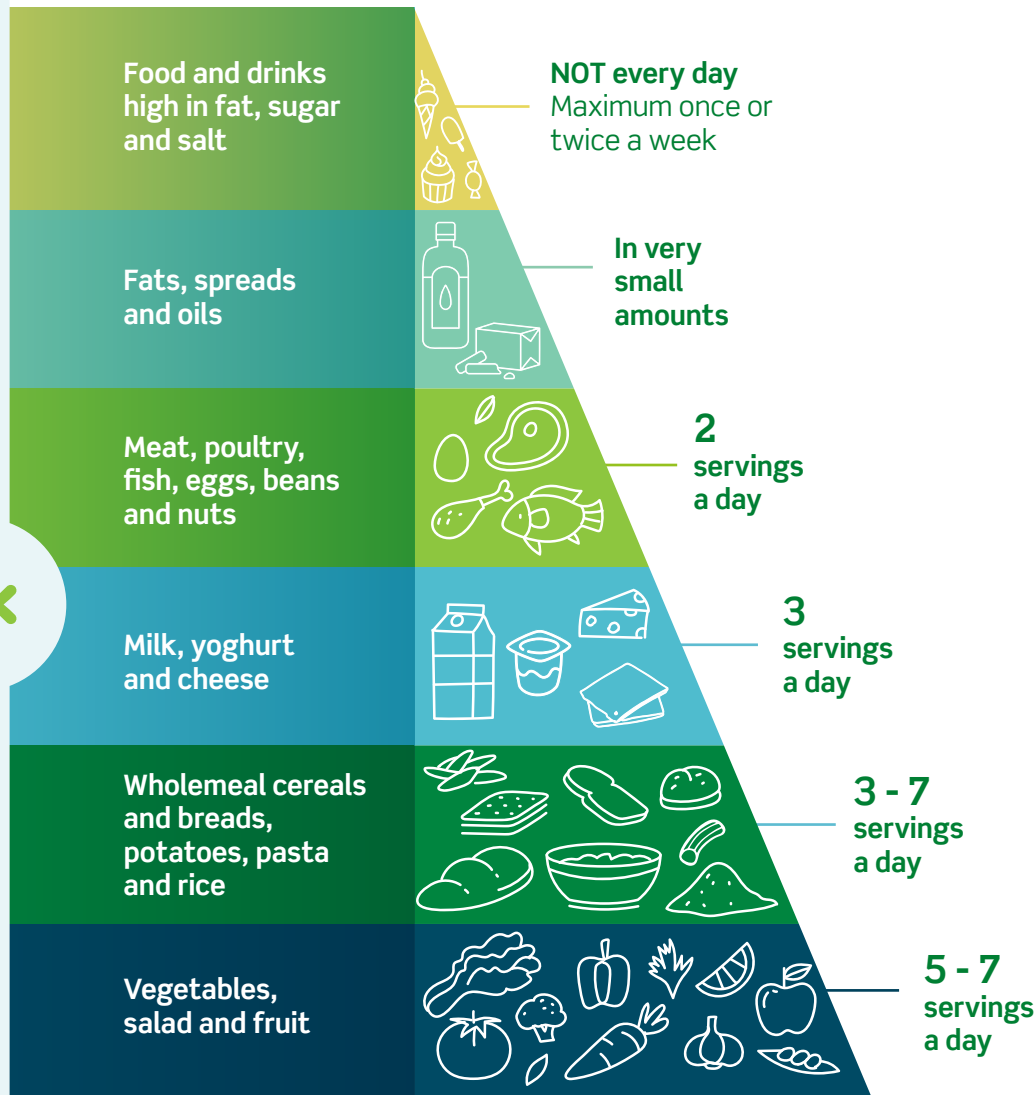
- Prepare your meals using mostly fresh ingredients and choose foods like fruits, salads and vegetables for snacks.
- Use healthier cooking methods like grilling and steaming instead of frying or roasting with oil or fat.
- Take time to enjoy your meals sitting at a table. Avoid eating in front of TV or computer screens
- Use the food pyramid as a guide for serving sizes.

## Fat facts

Ireland has one of the highest levels of obesity in Europe, with 6 in every 10 adults and over one in five children being overweight or seriously overweight. Being overweight means that your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. This extra pressure can cause wear and tear on your heart and blood vessels. Many people who are overweight for a long time develop high blood pressure or diabetes, which are both risk factors for heart disease and stroke.



# The Food Pyramid



Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day - water is best

## Salt and blood pressure

Eating too much salt (more than 6 grams or a teaspoon a day) is bad for your health. This is because it can raise your blood pressure. Having high blood pressure triples your chances of heart disease and stroke. Did you know that 75% of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy? But if you know what to look for, you can start choosing foods that are lower in salt.

## Tips to reduce your salt intake

- Eat home-cooked meals rather than ready-made.
- Don't add salt when cooking – use herbs, garlic and spices instead – or at the table.
- Go easy on smoked foods and processed meats like ham and bacon.
- Check the labels on bought foods – see how much salt is in the food per 100g.



Ireland has one of the highest levels of obesity in Europe – **6 in every 10 adults and more than 1 in 5 children** are overweight or seriously overweight



Did you know?

**75%**

of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy

# 6 Prostate and Other Cancers

Only men have a prostate gland. It is round and about the size of a golf ball. It is in the pelvis, against the base of the bladder, and surrounds the urethra, the tube that runs from your bladder through the penis to the outside (you pee through it).

One in seven men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetime, usually as they get older. Almost 4,000 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year in Ireland, with most cases developing in men aged 50 or older.

Men whose father or brother has been affected by prostate cancer are at slightly increased risk themselves. Recent research also suggests that obesity increases the risk of prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer does not usually cause any symptoms until the cancer has grown large enough to put pressure on the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the penis. These symptoms can be very similar to that of an enlarged prostate where the symptoms are:

- Frequent need to pee, especially at night.
- Rushing to the toilet.
- Difficulty starting to pee.
- Taking a long time to urinate.
- Having a weak flow.
- Feeling that your bladder has not emptied properly.
- Dribbling after you've finished peeing.
- Pain or discomfort peeing.



**1 in 7**

men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetime, usually as they get older.

Irish Cancer Society

Almost **4,000**

men are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year in Ireland, with most cases developing in men aged 50 or older.

If you have symptoms that could be caused by prostate cancer, you should visit a GP. While there is no single, definitive test for prostate cancer, your doctor will discuss the pros and cons of the various tests with you to try to avoid unnecessary anxiety.

### Bowel cancer

Bowel cancer is a common cancer in Ireland with about 2,560 people diagnosed each year. Bowel cancer is when normal cells in your bowel change and grow in an abnormal way. A group of these cancer cells can form a tumour. Cancer that begins in the large bowel is called colon cancer. This cancer may cause a blockage in your bowel, which can affect how your bowel works.

Risk factors which increase your chance of developing bowel cancer include:

- Age, most people who get bowel cancer are over 50
- Previous cancer—if you have had bowel cancer before
- A history of bowel cancer in your family
- Being overweight
- A diet high in fat and red meat and low in fibre, fruit and vegetables can increase your risk
- Drinking alcohol to excess and smoking may increase the risk for some people.

Being 'bowel aware' is the name of the game. Guts play up at the best of times but there are some warning signs that you shouldn't ignore:

- A lasting change in your bowel habit – going more often, looser motions or constipation.
- Blood in your poo or bleeding from your back passage.
- Pain or discomfort in your tummy area or back passage.
- Trapped wind or fullness in your tummy.
- A lump in your tummy area or rectum.
- Feeling you have not emptied your bowel fully after going to the toilet.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Feeling extreme tiredness

### Action points

- All of these symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cancer, but it's important to go to the GP and get any unusual changes checked out, especially if they go on for more than 4–6 weeks.
- Take part in the National Bowel Screening programme which is open to anyone aged 60 or over. If you haven't been contacted by the screening programme to get your home screening test kit, you can contact the service on 1800 45 45 55 or visit the website [www.bowelscreen.ie](http://www.bowelscreen.ie)

### Testicular cancer

Testicular cancer is rare, but it's the most common cancer in young men aged between 15 and 34. About 170 men are diagnosed with testicular cancer every year in Ireland. Testicular cancer is very treatable and is nearly always curable.

Symptoms of testicular cancer include:

- A painless lump or swelling in a testicle
- Pain or discomfort in a testicle or in the scrotum, groin or abdomen (tummy)
- An enlarged testicle or change in the way your testicle feels
- A heavy feeling in your scrotum



About  
**170**

men are diagnosed with testicular cancer every year in Ireland. Testicular cancer is very treatable and is nearly always curable.

Irish Cancer Society

Men aged between  
**15 and 34**

are most commonly effected by testicular cancer.

### Action points

- Check yourself once a month. The test is best done while you're in a warm bath or during a long shower as the warm water softens the skin of the scrotum.
- Hold the scrotum in the palm of your hand and feel the difference between the testicles. You will very probably feel that one is larger and lying lower, which is completely normal.
- Examine each one in turn, and then compare them with each other. Use both hands and gently roll each testicle between your thumb and forefinger. Both should be smooth, so check for any lumps or swellings. Remember that the duct carrying sperm to the penis, the epididymis, normally feels bumpy. It lies along the top and back of the testicle.
- Testing once a month is fine — testing too often makes it more difficult to notice any differences.
- Do not ignore a lump, check it out with your GP.

# 7 Sexual Health



## Erectile Dysfunction (ED or impotence)

Erectile dysfunction (ED) means that you cannot get and/or maintain an erection. In some cases the penis becomes partly erect but not hard enough to have sex properly. In other cases, there is no swelling or fullness of the penis at all. Both can have a significant effect on your sex life. Erectile dysfunction is sometimes called impotence.

### What causes erectile dysfunction?

Most men struggle to achieve or maintain an erection now and then. This can be due to:

- being tired
- being stressed
- being distracted
- drinking too much alcohol

For most men ED is only temporary, and an erection usually occurs when they are sexually aroused.

However, some men have persistent, or recurring ED problems and may be caused by some physical diseases, for example diabetes or some mental health problems.

ED is usually treatable, most commonly by a tablet taken before sex. You may also receive lifestyle advice and treatments to minimise your risk of heart disease. See our GP or local sexual health clinic for things you can do to help with erectile dysfunction.

Healthy lifestyle changes can sometimes help erectile dysfunction.

Do:

- lose weight if you're overweight
- stop smoking
- eat a healthy diet
- exercise daily
- try to reduce stress and anxiety

## Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

- STIs are common but most infections are treatable
- Many people have an infection but have no symptoms – often symptoms don't show up immediately
- The best way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to practice safe sex. Use a condom whenever you have sex (unless you are trying to start a family, or in a monogamous relationship)

If you have had unsafe sex or are worried, you can have a confidential check-up, and treatment if needed, at a genitourinary medicine (GUM) or STI clinic.

You can also do a home test which is free, discrete and available anywhere in Ireland. Log into [SH24.ie](https://www.sh24.ie) to order your free home test and to get instructions about what to do next. Anyone who is aged 17 or over can order a free STI test to their home or to any other valid postal address in Ireland.

# 8 Where to Get Help

Getting to see a health professional can be challenging when you're frequently away at sea. There are, increasingly, more ways to access health advice and information, some of which will be available in your area or will suit you better than others.

Unsure where your nearest health service contact is? Use the HSE's Health Atlas on [www.hse.ie/eng/services/maps](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/maps) which will find your nearest GP, hospital or pharmacist anywhere in Ireland. You can also contact the HSELive team on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) and get help navigating their services.

## Pharmacists

Pharmacists, also called chemists, are highly qualified professionals providing advice on the use and selection of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. They can give advice on how to manage small problems and common conditions. This includes lifestyle advice about eating habits, exercise and stopping smoking, but they will also tell you where you can get further advice.

## General Practitioners or Family Doctors

GPs provide a broad service to their patients on all health issues, and may refer patients to see specialists or hospital consultants if they need more treatment or diagnosis. Opening times of GP surgeries vary but most are open at set times on weekdays. Calling at other times will put you in touch with an out-of-hours system. It's always best to see your own doctor if possible, so unless your problem is urgent and cannot wait, you should make an appointment to be seen by your normal doctor. If you tell the practice that you are a fisherman they may be more willing to accommodate you with one of their emergency appointment slots.

## Getting the best from your doctor

- Write down your symptoms before you see your doctor. It's extremely easy to forget the most important things during the examination.
- Doctors will spot important clues about a problem by asking questions such as: When did the problem start and how did it feel? Did anyone else suffer as well? Has this ever happened before? What have you done about it so far? Are you taking any medicine for it?
- Ask questions, and don't be afraid to ask your doctor to give more information or make something clear that you don't understand. Asking them to write it down for you is a good idea.

- Get to the point – if you have a lump or bump, say so. Time is limited so there is a real danger of you coming out with a prescription for a sore nose when you might need a serious problem sorted.
- Have your prescription explained, and ask whether you can buy any medicines from your chemist. Make sure you know what each medicine is for. Some medicines clash badly with alcohol.

### GP out-of-hours service

Your GP will have their out of hours information on the answer machine if you ring them outside normal clinic hours. This service does not provide routine clinic appointments and if your medical issue is non urgent you should make an appointment with your GP during normal clinic hours.

To find an emergency out of hours GP go to [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) where there is an easy search facility to give you the best number.

### HSE Injury Units

Injury Units are for the treatment of broken bones, dislocations, sprains, strains, wounds, scalds and minor burns that are unlikely to need admission to hospital. Staff in Injury Units perform x-rays, reduce joint dislocations, apply plaster casts and treat wounds by stitches or other means.

Injury Units do not treat children under the age of five (or 10 in some cases), serious head injuries, abdominal (stomach) pain, medical illnesses or mental health problems.

You can find details for all units on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

### Dentists

You will have to pay for dental check-ups and treatment unless you receive certain benefits. To find a HSE dentist in your area, go to [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

### Accident and emergency

Accident and emergency departments treat serious accidents or life-threatening illnesses such as heart attacks or medical conditions which suddenly become worse. They are open 24 hours a day all year, and may be used by people who should really see their own doctor or a pharmacist.

You should be prepared to wait if there are people more seriously ill than you.

### European Health Insurance Card

The European Health Insurance Card or EHIC (formerly the E11) allows the holder to access health care services when travelling abroad in another EU or EEA country. There is **no charge** for this card and you must get one **before** you travel. You must submit your application in person or by post to your Local Health Office. You can find details on how to apply on [hse.ie](http://hse.ie)

### Drugs Payment Scheme

Under the Drugs Payment Scheme, an individual or a family only has to pay a certain amount each month for prescribed drugs and medicines. This scheme is aimed at those who don't have a Medical Card and who normally have to pay the full cost of their medication. Anyone ordinarily resident in Ireland can apply to join the scheme, regardless of family, financial circumstances or nationality.

To join you can get a form at your Local Health Office, your pharmacy or on [hse.ie](http://hse.ie)

### Health advice and information, 24 hours a day

Ireland [www.webdoctor.ie/ask-a-gp-question](http://www.webdoctor.ie/ask-a-gp-question)

### Useful websites about health

Ireland's Health Services – [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

Male Health – [www.menshealthforumireland.org](http://www.menshealthforumireland.org)

Healthy Eating – [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)

Healthy Ireland – [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) – [Healthy Ireland](http://Healthy Ireland)

### Helplines (health related)

#### Alcohol

HSE Drug and alcohol helpline 1800 459 459  
(Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm) Alcohol – [HSE.ie](http://HSE.ie)

AA helpline 01 842 0700 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5pm)  
[www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

#### Cancer

Irish Cancer Society 1800 200 700 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)  
[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

### Diabetes

Diabetes Helpline 01 842 8118 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie)

### Health Service Executive (HSE)

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) HSE Live team (live chat Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm)

Callsave 1800 700 700 (Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm)

Phone: 01 240 8787 (Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm)

### Heart

Heart helpline 1800 25 25 50 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and Thursday to 7pm) [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

### Sexual Wellbeing

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

### Smoking

Stop smoking helpline 1800 201 203 [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) (live chat Monday to Friday 10am to 7pm and Saturday 10am to 1pm) free text QUIT to 50100

### Stress and Mental Health

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

Aware 1800 804 848 (Monday to Sunday 10am to 10pm) [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

Samaritans 116 123 (24 hour helpline) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Pieta House 1800 247 247 (24 hour helpline) [www.pieta.ie](http://www.pieta.ie)

### Substance Use/Drugs

[www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie) friendly, confidential drugs advice 1800 459 459 (Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm) (live chat Monday to Friday 10am to 1pm and 2.30pm to 5pm)

### Services for seafarers

All consular and diplomatic contacts can be found at [www.ireland.ie/en/dfa/embassies-in-ireland/](http://www.ireland.ie/en/dfa/embassies-in-ireland/)





FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

AT SEA

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AND MOUTH

DRINK, DRUGS  
AND CIGARETTES

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HEALTH

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KEEP WELL

PROSTATE AND  
OTHER CANCERS

SEXUAL  
HEALTH

WHERE TO  
GET HELP