

Heart disease and stroke – major health problems

Heart disease and stroke account for almost 40% of deaths in Ireland, killing over 10,500 people here in 2004.*

Lifestyle plays a major part in the development of heart disease and stroke. For example, an unhealthy diet can place you at risk as it can lead to obesity (being overweight) and can cause high cholesterol levels. Obesity currently accounts for at least 2,500 deaths in Ireland each year.**

Smoking is also a major cause of heart disease and smokers are twice as likely to have a heart attack as non-smokers.*** The risk of heart disease also increases for people who get little or no physical exercise.

However the good news is that the risk of developing heart disease and stroke can be significantly reduced or even prevented by taking various steps towards better heart health. Taking these steps should help you to feel better and to live a longer, healthier life

* Central Statistics Office Ireland

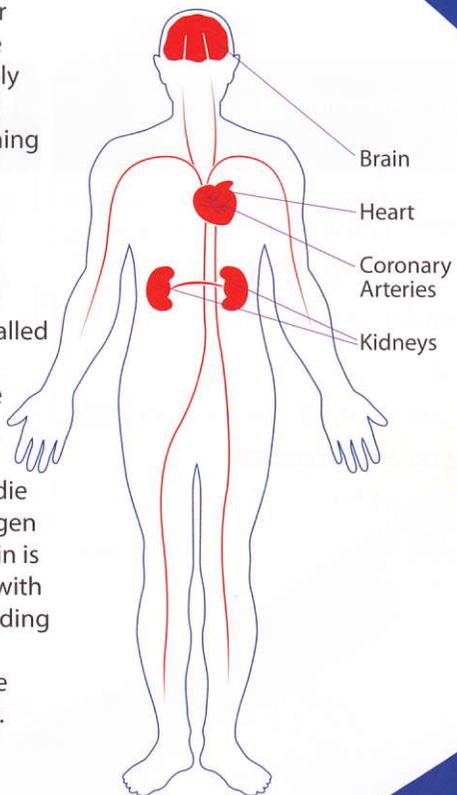
** www.healthpromotion.ie

*** www.irishheart.ie



What are heart disease and stroke?

The heart is a muscular pump that constantly pumps blood around your body. Because it works very hard, the heart itself needs a good blood supply to its muscles. Small tubes called the coronary arteries carry blood containing oxygen and nutrients to the heart muscle. Narrowing of the coronary arteries makes it difficult for blood to reach the heart muscle and can lead to heart disease. A person with heart disease may experience chest pain called angina, especially after exercising. If an artery leading to the heart muscle becomes completely blocked, it is called a heart attack. During a heart attack cells in the heart muscle may die because they are starved of vital oxygen and nutrients. Like the heart, the brain is also supplied with arteries to feed it with oxygen and nutrients. If an artery leading to the brain is completely blocked, brain cells may die and brain damage may occur – this is known as a stroke.



What are the risk factors for heart disease?

A number of factors which cause heart disease and stroke have been identified. Some of these are factors you have no control over, eg. your age or gender. These are known as 'non-modifiable' risk factors.

However there are also many 'modifiable' risk factors which you do have control over, eg. high cholesterol, high blood pressure and smoking. By controlling your modifiable risk factors you can reduce your overall risk of developing heart disease or stroke. You can find out more about your modifiable risk factors on the following pages.

Non-Modifiable risk factors

- Family history – Has a close relative died of heart disease?
- Gender – Are you male?
- Age –
If you are male, are you over 40?
If you are female, are you over 50?

Modifiable risk factors

1. High cholesterol
2. Smoking
3. High blood pressure
4. Obesity (being overweight)
5. Lack of exercise
6. Diabetes