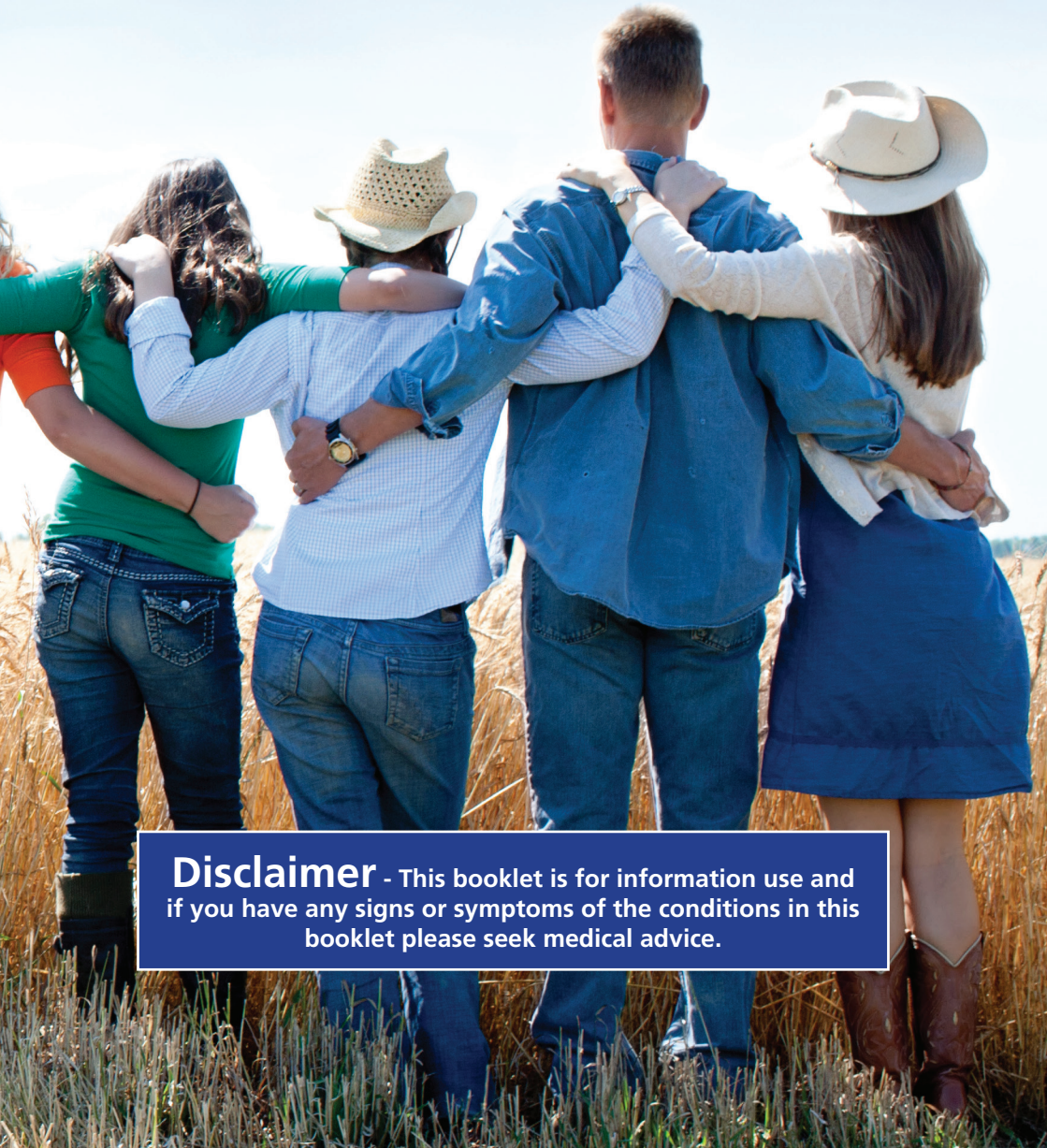


# Health and Wellbeing





**Disclaimer** - This booklet is for information use and if you have any signs or symptoms of the conditions in this booklet please seek medical advice.

## Acne

Acne is a common skin condition that affects most people at some point. It causes spots, oily skin and sometimes skin that's hot or painful to touch.

### Who's affected?

Acne is very common in teenagers and younger adults. About 95% of people aged 11 to 30 are affected by acne to some extent.

Most people have acne on and off for several years before their symptoms start to improve as they get older.



### Symptoms of Acne

Acne most commonly develops on the:

- Face – this affects almost everyone with acne
- Back – this affects more than half of people with acne
- Chest – this affects about 15% of people with acne



### There are 6 main types of spot caused by acne:

- blackheads
- Whiteheads
- papules
- pustules
- nodules
- cysts

### Things you can try if you have acne

These self-help techniques may be useful:

- Do not wash affected areas of skin more than twice a day. Frequent washing can irritate the skin and make symptoms worse.
- Wash the affected area with a mild soap or cleanser and lukewarm water. Very hot or cold water can make acne worse.
- Do not try to “clean out” blackheads or squeeze spots. This can make them worse and cause permanent scarring.
- Avoid using too much make-up and cosmetics.
- Completely remove make-up before going to bed.

### When to seek medical advice

You should see a GP if you have moderate or severe acne or you develop nodules or cysts, as they need to be treated properly to avoid scarring.

## Atopic eczema

Atopic eczema (atopic dermatitis) is the most common form of eczema, a condition that causes the skin to become itchy, dry and cracked.

Atopic eczema is more common in children, often developing before their first birthday. But it may also develop for the first time in adults.

It's usually a long-term (chronic) condition, although it can improve significantly, or even clear completely, in some children as they get older.

### Symptoms of atopic eczema

Atopic eczema causes the skin to become itchy, dry, cracked and sore.

Some people only have small patches of dry skin, but others may experience widespread inflamed skin all over the body.

Inflamed skin can become red on lighter skin, and darker brown, purple or grey on darker skin. This can also be more difficult to see on darker skin.

Although atopic eczema can affect any part of the body, it most often affects the hands, insides of the elbows, backs of the knees and the face and scalp in children.

People with atopic eczema usually have periods when symptoms are less noticeable, as well as periods when symptoms become more severe (flare-ups).

## When to seek medical advice

See a GP if you have symptoms of atopic eczema. They'll usually be able to diagnose atopic eczema by looking at your skin and asking questions, such as:

- whether the rash is itchy and where it appears
- when the symptoms first began
- whether it comes and goes over time
- whether there's a history of atopic eczema in your family
- whether you have any other conditions, such as [allergies](#) or [asthma](#)
- whether something in your diet or lifestyle may be contributing to your symptoms

Typically, to be diagnosed with atopic eczema you should have had an itchy skin condition in the last 12 months and 3 or more of the following:

- visibly irritated red skin in the creases of your skin – such as the insides of your elbows or behind your knees (or on the cheeks, outsides of elbows, or fronts of the knees in children aged 18 months or under) at the time of examination by a health professional
- a history of skin irritation occurring in the same areas mentioned above
- generally dry skin in the last 12 months
- a history of asthma or [hay fever](#) – children under 4 must have an immediate relative, such as a parent, brother or sister, who has 1 of these conditions
- the condition started before the age of 2 (this does not apply to children under the age of 4)

## Causes of atopic eczema

The exact cause of atopic eczema is unknown, but it's clear it is not down to one single thing.

Atopic eczema often occurs in people who get [allergies](#). "Atopic" means sensitivity to allergens.

It can run in families, and often develops alongside other conditions, such as [asthma](#) and [hay fever](#).

The symptoms of atopic eczema often have certain triggers, such as soaps, detergents, stress and the weather.

Sometimes [food allergies](#) can play a part, especially in young children with severe eczema.

You may be asked to keep a food diary to try to determine whether a specific food makes your symptoms worse.

[Allergy tests](#) are not usually needed, although they're sometimes helpful in identifying whether a food allergy may be triggering symptoms.



## Treating atopic eczema

Treatment for atopic eczema can help to relieve the symptoms and many cases improve over time.

But there's currently no cure and severe eczema often has a significant impact on daily life, which may be difficult to cope with physically and mentally.

There's also an increased risk of skin infections. Many different treatments can be used to control symptoms and manage eczema, including:

- self-care techniques, such as reducing scratching and avoiding triggers
- [emollients](#) (moisturising treatments) – used on a daily basis for dry skin
- [topical corticosteroids](#) – used to reduce swelling, redness and itching during flare-ups

## Other types of eczema

Eczema is the name for a group of skin conditions that cause dry, irritated skin.

Other types of eczema include:

- [discoid eczema](#) – a type of eczema that occurs in circular or oval patches on the skin
- [contact dermatitis](#) – a type of eczema that occurs when the body comes into contact with a particular substance
- [varicose eczema](#) – a type of eczema that most often affects the lower legs and is caused by problems with the flow of blood through the leg veins
- [seborrhoeic eczema](#) – a type of eczema where red, scaly patches develop on the sides of the nose, eyebrows, ears and scalp
- [dyshidrotic eczema](#) (pompholyx) – a type of eczema that causes tiny blisters to erupt across the palms of the hands

For more information - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/acne/>

## Psoriasis

### What is psoriasis?

- It is a chronic, systemic, inflammatory skin disease.
- It most commonly affects elbows, knees, scalp, and lower back
- It is related to the immune system – an autoimmune disease.
- It may run in families
- It is not curable, but treatments are available.
- It is not contagious, infectious or the result of poor hygiene.
- There is a strong association between psoriasis and depression
- It can affect at least 73,000 people in Ireland.



### Potential triggers

- Infections such as streptococcal throat infection
- Emotional stress
- Medications such as lithium, beta blockers, and anti-malarials.
- Skin Injury such as a cut, scrape, insect bite, or burn.
- Climate such as cold temperature changes
- Lifestyle factors such as Stress, alcohol, cigarette smoking, and obesity.

## How is psoriasis treated?

The treatment is not a cure, but it will ensure a better quality of life. The treatment depends on its severity and location.

- topical treatments - creams or ointments applied directly to the skin
- ultraviolet light therapy - phototherapy, delivered in hospital dermatology departments
- systemic medications - medicines that work inside your body
- biologic treatments - medicines based on compounds made by living cells.

Talk with your doctor to find a treatment regimen that is most appropriate for you.

### General Skin Care Tips

- Be gentle – don't scrub your skin or take a bath or shower in hot water — irritating it.
- Keep your skin well moisturized
- Use sun protection



For more information - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/psoriasis/>

## Skin Cancer

### What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer occurs when skin cells become abnormal. The most common cancer type in Ireland, 9 out of every 10 skin cancers are caused by UV light radiation from the sun, or from sunbeds.

### Types of skin cancer

The skin is the largest organ in the body and is made up of two layers:

- The epidermis is the outer layer
- The dermis is the inner layer



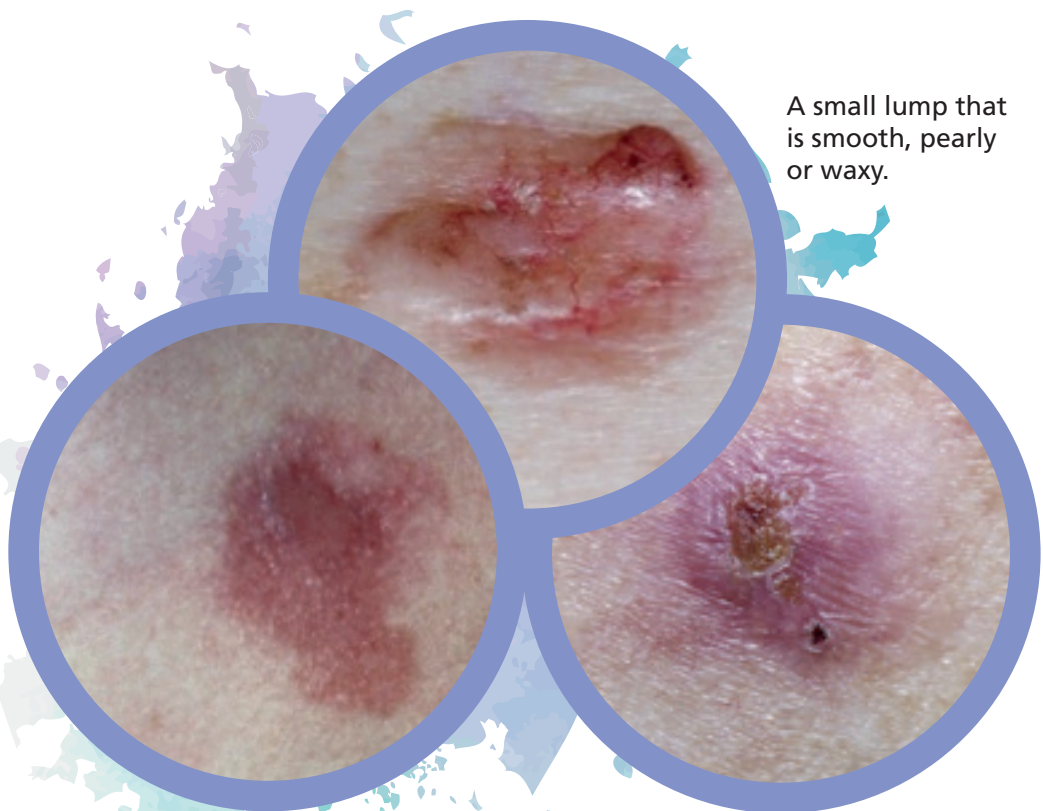


## Non-melanoma skin cancers

These are the most common types of skin cancer and include basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas. They tend to grow in areas of the body that have been exposed to the sun and are more common in older people.

It's estimated that an average of 12,000 non-melanoma skin cancers were diagnosed in Ireland during 2018-2020.

### What are the symptoms of non-melanoma skin cancer?



A small lump that is smooth, pearly or waxy.

A flat red spot that is scaly, crusty or bleeding

A lump is firm, scaly or has a crusted surface and may be sore

## Melanoma skin cancer

Melanoma is quite rare but greater numbers of people are being diagnosed with it each year. It is also a disease that affects young people. It's estimated that on average 1,100 melanoma skin cancers were diagnosed in Ireland during 2018-2020.

Melanoma is one of the most serious forms of skin cancer but if spotted early, it is very treatable. If not, it can spread to other parts of the body and cause serious medical issues.

### What are the symptoms of melanoma skin cancer?

The most common symptoms of melanoma are:

- A mole that suddenly gets bigger or you find a new one on your skin
- A mole that develops a ragged or uneven outline
- A mole with a mixture of different shades of brown, black or other colours through it
- A mole that is bigger than the blunt end of a pencil
- A mole that looks red or inflamed around the edges
- A mole that is bleeding, oozing or crusting
- A mole that starts to feel different, for example, slightly itchy or painful

## Skin changes to look out for

Skin cancers do not all look the same. They can appear in a number of ways including any of the following:

- A small lump
- Flat, red spot
- Firm, red lump
- A lump or spot that is tender to touch
- An ulcer that will not heal
- A lump with a scaly or horny top
- Rough, scaly patches
- A new or changing mole

For more information - [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



## Breast Cancer

### What are the symptoms of melanoma skin cancer?

- Breast cancer is when cells in your breast change and grow in an abnormal way. A group of these cancer cells can form a tumour.
- Most common type of cancer in women in Ireland (after skin cancer).
- 1 in 9 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.
- Although rare, men can be diagnosed with breast cancer also.
- 23% of all women diagnosed in Ireland are between 20 and 50 years of age.
- Better treatments mean that more women are living with and being cured of breast cancer – through research and development, survival rates have increased to 85%.
- If you notice any changes when checking your breasts, you should attend your GP in order to be fully assessed.





# RISK FACTORS

## UNCONTROLLABLE RISK FACTORS



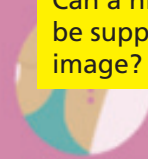
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# SIGNS OF BREAST CANCER

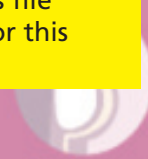
Any of the following irregularities you notice in your breasts should be investigated by your doctor straightaway.



A thickening or lump in the breast



Constant pain in the armpit or in one part of the breast



A change in shape or size in one or both breasts



Unusual discharge from one or both nipples



Skin changes like dimpling, puckering or redness



Swelling in the collarbone or armpit



Nipple becoming irregular in shape or sinking into the breast



Crusted or flaky skin or a rash around the nipple

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## Breast Screening:

This is a nationwide programme which invited all women from age 50 to 69 to have a free mammogram every 2 years.



Results will be sent to both the patient and the GP within 3 weeks.

For more information, visit [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie)

## Cervical Cancer

- The cervix is located inside the vagina at the lower end of the womb (uterus). It is the neck of the womb, is shaped like a cone and is approx.. 2.5cm long.
- Cancer of the cervix is cancer of the cells lining your cervix. At first abnormal (precancerous) changes occur. These abnormal cells are called cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN). These cells are not cancerous but if left untreated may develop into cancer.
- Each year around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 90 women die from the disease. Research shows that 90% of cervical cancer cases can be linked back to HPV.
- It is not infectious and cannot be passed on to others.
- If you notice any of the symptoms below, or have any concerns, you should attend your GP in order to be fully assessed.

### Cervical Check:

This is a nationwide programme offered to women from the age of 25 to 65.

It is carried out in the GP practice or in a screening clinic and each women in Ireland should receive a letter from the screening programme to invite them to book an appointment. Once the letter has been received, an appointment can be booked. Follow-up appointments may be needed if abnormalities are detected (such as colposcopy/biopsy).

If 25-29 years, should have smear test every 3 years.

If 30-34 years, the test should be completed every 5 years.

Before the age of 25, you can have a screening test carried out privately (which may cost approx. €50).

For more information, visit [www.cervicalcheck.ie](http://www.cervicalcheck.ie)

### HPV Vaccine:

- The HPV vaccine is proven to prevent 7 out of 10 pre-cancer and cancers developing.
- The HPV vaccine has been offered to girls in their first year of secondary school since 2010. This is because the most common cancer caused by the HPV virus is cervical cancer which only affects women.
- Since September 2019, boys have also been offered the HPV vaccine. This is because HPV can cause cancers and genital warts in boys too.
- The more young people vaccinated - both boys and girls - the better we can control the spread of the infection.
- Over 90 separate pieces of research have been completed showing this vaccine's safety and effectiveness.
- Over 80 countries now have a vaccination programme, with 20 of these countries giving the vaccine to both boys and girls.
- Gardasil 9 is currently being used in Ireland.
- 2 injections if under 15 years of age, if over 15 will require 3 injections, done at 0, 1 and 6 months.
- The HPV vaccine now protects against the types of HPV that cause 9 out of 10 cervical cancers.
- Still need to have smear tests completed, as the vaccine cannot cause 100% protection.

### What is HPV:

- Human Papillomavirus is a virus that infects squamous epithelium including the skin, and mucous membranes of the upper respiratory and anogenital tract.
- There are over 100 types of HPV.
- Some of these are low-risk types (e.g. HPV 6 and 11) which cause genital warts, while others are high-risk types (e.g. HPV 16, 18, etc.) and are associated with various cancers such as cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, penis and oropharynx.
- Transmission of genital HPV can occur during vaginal, oral or anal sexual intercourse or genital contact with an infected person. Non-sexual routes of transmission include transmission from mother to baby in the period immediately before or after birth.

For more information - [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

## Prostate Cancer

### What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is when the cells of your prostate gland grow in an abnormal way to form a lump (tumour). In some men prostate cancer grows slowly; in others it grows more quickly and spreads to other parts of your body. Prostate cancer is a common cancer in Ireland. Around 3,900 men are diagnosed with it each year.

### Early (localised) prostate cancer:

This is prostate cancer found only within the prostate gland. It has not spread outside your prostate gland. With early prostate cancer there may be no symptoms. Your doctor may only suspect it after doing a PSA test.

### Locally spread prostate cancer:

Cancer that has broken through the capsule (covering) of the prostate or has spread outside the gland to nearby tissues. Places where the cancer might spread include tissues such as your seminal vesicles, lymph nodes, neck of your bladder or your back passage (rectum). The seminal vesicles are two glands that sit just behind your prostate gland and store seminal fluid. Some treatments for locally spread prostate cancer hope to cure it, while others aim to control the disease or stop it from growing.

### Metastatic (advanced) prostate cancer:

This is when prostate cancer cells have spread and are affecting other parts of your body, away from the prostate gland. The most common place for prostate cancer to spread to is your bones. Read more about metastatic prostate cancer.



These risk factors can increase your chance of developing prostate cancer:

- **Age:** The risk increases with age. It usually affects men over 50. Nearly 2 in every 3 prostate cancers are diagnosed in men over 65.
- **Family history:** Your risk is higher if you have a brother or father with the disease. It is also higher if your relative developed prostate cancer at a younger age or if you have more than one relative with the disease. The 2 genes identified as increase risk are the Brca1 and Brca2 genes. Men with Brca2 are twice as likely to develop prostate cancer.
- **Race:** Black men are at a higher risk of developing prostate cancer.

### Reducing your risk of prostate cancer

The most important things you can do to reduce your risk is:

- Be a healthy weight
- Eat a healthy diet
- Be physically active
- Know your family history and have a discussion with your GP about the pros/cons of PSA/DRE testing.

For more information - [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

## Diabetes Type 1 v Type 2

### Diabetes

Diabetes is a lifelong condition that causes a person's blood sugar level to become too high.

There are 2 main types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 Diabetes** – where the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin
- **Type 2 Diabetes** – where the body does not produce enough insulin, or the body's cells do not react to insulin

Type 2 diabetes is far more common than type 1. In the UK, around 90% of all adults with diabetes have type 2.

During pregnancy, some women have such high levels of blood glucose that their body is unable to produce enough insulin to absorb it all. This is known as gestational diabetes.

### What is type 1 diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes causes the level of glucose (sugar) in your blood to become too high.

It happens when your body cannot produce enough of a hormone called insulin, which controls blood glucose.

You need to take insulin every day to keep your blood glucose levels under control.

Managing type 1 diabetes can take time to get used to, but you can still do all the things you enjoy. This guide is here to help.

Type 1 diabetes is not linked with age or being overweight – these things are linked with type 2 diabetes.

### Symptoms

- feeling very thirsty
- frequent urination, particularly at night
- fatigue
- weight loss
- thrush that keeps coming back
- blurred vision
- prolonged healing time for wounds
- fruity-smelling breath

## What is Type 2 Diabetes

- **Type 2 diabetes is a common condition** that causes the level of sugar (glucose) in the blood to become too high.
- **It can cause symptoms like excessive thirst, needing to pee a lot and tiredness.** It can also increase your risk of getting serious problems with your eyes, heart and nerves.
- **It's a lifelong condition that can affect your everyday life.** You may need to change your diet, take medicines and have regular check-ups.
- **It's caused by problems with a chemical in the body (hormone) called insulin.** It's often linked to being overweight or inactive, or having a family history of type 2 diabetes.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of type 2 diabetes include:

- frequent urination, particularly at night
- feeling thirsty all the time
- fatigue
- weight loss
- itching around your penis or vagina, or repeatedly getting thrush
- Prolonged healing time for wounds
- blurred vision

### You're more at risk of developing type 2 diabetes if you:

- are over 40 (or 25 for south Asian people)
- have a close relative with diabetes (such as a parent, brother or sister)
- are overweight or obese
- are of Asian, African-Caribbean or black African origin (even if you were born in the UK)

For more information - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/type-1-diabetes/>

## Irritable Bowel Disease & Crohn's Disease

**Crohn's disease** is a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that can affect different parts of the digestive tract. It is often confused with the non-inflammatory condition called irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). IBD is the term for a group of inflammatory conditions that affect the digestive tract, which include Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Although some signs and symptoms of Crohn's disease and IBS overlap, both conditions have different causes and treatments.

### Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

IBS is a chronic functional disorder of the GI tract characterised by chronic abdominal pain and altered bowel habits. In people with IBS, the colon muscle tends to contract more causing cramps and pain. People with IBS also tend to have a lower pain tolerance and show no clinical signs of a disease, often having normal test results.

### What are the signs and symptoms of IBS?

- Abdominal pain
- Cramps
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Urgent bowel movements
- A feeling of incomplete evacuation
- Pain across the entire abdomen but mostly in the lower right or left

## Crohn's disease

Crohn's disease may affect any part of the GI tract from the mouth to the anus, although it's most often found at the end of the small intestine and the beginning of the large bowel. In Crohn's, the immune system mistakes food, bacteria or other materials in the GI tract for foreign substances and responds by sending white blood cells into the lining of the bowels. The result of the immune system's attack is chronic inflammation.

### What are the signs and symptoms of Crohn's disease?

Crohn's disease can cause the same symptoms as IBS, along with the following:

- Eye inflammation
- Extreme fatigue
- Intestinal scarring
- Joint pain
- Malnutrition
- Rectal bleeding
- Weight loss

### How are they diagnosed?

Diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and Crohn's is different.

Crohn's is diagnosed based on a variety of tests, whereas IBS is diagnosed by ruling out other diseases and conditions.

IBS diagnosis is based on medical history, family history, physical exam, symptoms and ruling out other conditions.

Whereas, diagnosis of Crohn's, unlike IBS, will require medical tests, such as blood and stool tests and endoscopic evaluations, such as esophagogastrosocopy and colonoscopy.

These tests will be used to diagnose IBD, as well as rule out other medical conditions.

## How are Crohn's disease and IBS treated?

Treatments for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and Crohn's vary based on severity. Although IBS often responds well to lifestyle changes and avoiding triggers.

- IBS may be treated with certain medications, such as intestinal antispasmodics
- Dietary and lifestyle changes seem to help the most. People with IBS should avoid aggravating their condition with fried fatty foods and caffeinated beverages.

In Crohn's, the primary goal is treating and preventing inflammation that over time can damage the intestines. Common treatment options for Crohn's disease can include:

- Corticosteroids
- 5-ASA drugs (aminosalicylates)
- Immunomodulators
- Biologics, such as infliximab and adalimumab
- Surgery
- Dietary changes

For more information -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/crohns-disease/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>



# Thyroid Diseases

The thyroid gland is located in the neck, just in front of the windpipe. The gland could be imagined as having a butterfly shape with either 'wing' wrapping around the trachea. The purpose of the thyroid gland is to produce a range of hormones which help regulate metabolism. Like many glands and organs in the human body there are a number of diseases or disorders which can affect how the thyroid gland functions, such as:

- Hypothyroidism (Underactive Thyroid)
- Hyperthyroidism (Overactive Thyroid)
- Thyroiditis
- Thyroid Cancer

## Hypothyroidism (Underactive Thyroid)

### Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Highly sensitive to cold
- Irregular or menstrual cycles
- Unexplained weight gain
- Pain or numbness in hands
- Constipation
- Loss of libido
- Slow physical reaction times and thought processes
- Constipation
- Muscle cramps
- Depression
- Dry or scaly skin
- Brittle hair and nails

### Causes

An underactive thyroid may actually be caused by a person's own immune system attacking and damaging the thyroid, often for no apparent reason. This then means that the thyroid is no longer working efficiently and can no longer produce sufficient hormone levels. Another cause is a person had their thyroid removed by surgery. A lack of iodine in the diet can therefore cause an underactive thyroid.

### Treatment

An underactive thyroid is often treated by taking hormone replacement tablets.

## Hyperthyroidism (Overactive Thyroid)

### Symptoms

- Persistent thirst
- Sensitive to heat
- Mood swings
- Increased anxiety
- Loss of libido
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Itchiness
- Muscle weakness
- Diarrhoea

### Causes

There are a number of causes of an overactive thyroid

**Thyroid Nodules:** Generally benign 'lumps' containing extra thyroid tissue which can produce extra hormones. Generally affects people over the age of 60.

**Graves Disease:** An autoimmune condition where your immune system mistakenly attacks your thyroid causing the overproduction of hormones. Graves disease is believed to be the cause of 75% of all overactive thyroids.

**Iodine:** Iodine is an essential mineral for a healthy thyroid, however an oversupply of the mineral can cause an overproduction of hormones.

### Treatment

- Medicines to decrease hormone production
- Radioactive Iodine treatments which actually kill some of the active cells in the thyroid to decrease hormone production potential.
- Surgery to remove part of or the entire gland.

## Thyroiditis

Thyroiditis is the swelling of the thyroid gland. It can cause either high or low hormone production.

### Symptoms

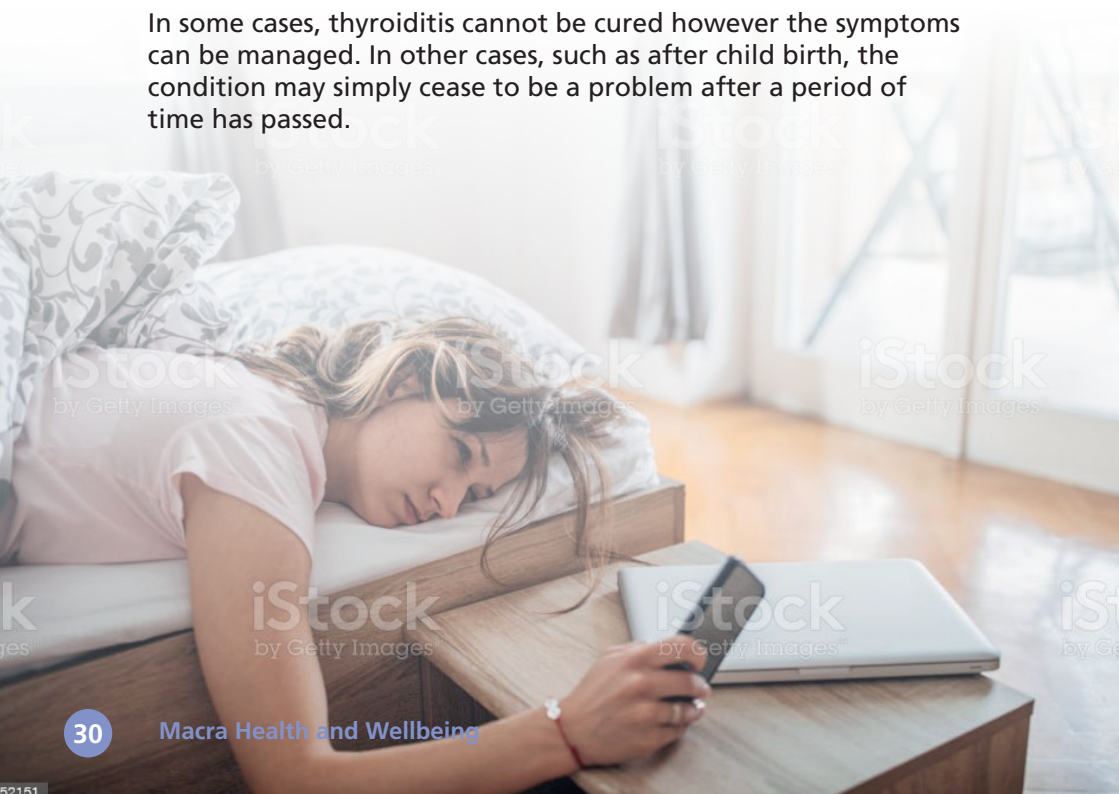
Symptoms of over or under active thyroid as described above.

### Causes

- Autoimmune attack of the gland
- Side effect of viral infection such as flu or mumps
- The recent birth of a child
- The use of a small number of specialised medicines

### Treatment

In some cases, thyroiditis cannot be cured however the symptoms can be managed. In other cases, such as after child birth, the condition may simply cease to be a problem after a period of time has passed.



## Thyroid Cancer

A rare type of cancer, most common in people in their 30's and those over the age of 60

A painless lump or swelling low down in the front of the neck. The likelihood of a neck lump being cancerous increases if:

- It feels firm
- Does not move around under the skin easily
- Gets bigger over time

Other symptoms can include:

- Unexplained and persistent hoarseness
- Pain in the neck
- Difficulty swallowing/breathing
- Persistent sore throat

### Treatment

The most common treatments for thyroid cancer are:

- Thyroidectomy: Removal of part or all of the thyroid gland
- Radioactive Iodine treatment: Ingestion of a radioactive substance which kills the cancer cells
- External radiotherapy: Beams of radiation are directed at the cancer to kill the cells
- Chemo or targeted therapies: medicines used to kill cancer cells.

For more information -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/overactive-thyroid-hyperthyroidism/>

# Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is the name for a group of lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

COPD is a common condition that affects middle age or older adults that smoke. Breathing problems gradually get worse over time and can limit daily activities, with many people not knowing that they have the condition.

## Symptoms of COPD

The main symptoms of COPD are:

- increasing breathlessness
- a persistent chesty cough with phlegm – some people may dismiss this as just a “smoker’s cough”
- frequent chest infections
- persistent wheezing

Without treatment, the symptoms usually get progressively worse. There may also be periods when they get suddenly worse, known as a flare-up or exacerbation.

## Causes of COPD

COPD happens when the lungs become inflamed, damaged and narrowed. The main cause is smoking. The likelihood of developing COPD increases the more you smoke and the longer you’ve smoked. Some cases of COPD are caused by long-term exposure to harmful fumes or dust. Others are the result of a rare genetic problem which means the lungs are more vulnerable to damage.

## Treatments for COPD

The damage to the lungs caused by COPD is permanent, but treatment can help slow down the progression of the condition.

Treatments include:

- Stopping smoking – if you have COPD and you smoke, this is the most important thing you can do.
- Inhalers and medicines – to help make breathing easier.
- Pulmonary rehabilitation – a specialized programme of exercise and education.
- Surgery or a lung transplant – although this is only an option for a very small number of people.

## Preventing COPD

COPD is largely a preventable condition. You can significantly reduce your chances of developing it if you avoid smoking. If you already smoke, stopping can help prevent further damage to your lungs before it starts to cause troublesome symptoms.

For more information - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/copd>





# Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder which affects the brain and has a tendency to have repeated seizures.

It is a long term condition but can be managed by the person which means they may not have active seizures.

Nearly 40,000 people in Ireland have epilepsy as do 50 million people worldwide.

## Causes:

In half of cases there is no known cause. Some causes are inborn or developmental such as genetic abnormalities or structural problems in the brain like malformed veins or areas which have not developed normally.

Most people with epilepsy have no family history of it but some epilepsies are more common in some families.

Some epilepsies are genetic but may not be inherited. A genetic change may be part of the person's unique genetic makeup but may not affect their family members.

Research into genetics and epilepsy is finding more and more genetic causes for epilepsy.

## Diagnosis

A diagnosis of epilepsy is made by a consultant taking into account eye witness descriptions of seizures and also test results. Results of tests can help support the diagnosis and even pinpoint the seizure type. Tests include the routine awake EEG, sleep and sleep deprived EEG and either CT brain scan or MRI.

## Treatment:

The main treatment for epilepsy are Anti-Epileptic-Drugs. The type prescribed will depend on the seizure type and often more than one drug is needed. These drugs are all designed to stop too much electrical activity in the brain. The main aim of these drugs is to stop the seizures completely. This can sometimes take time to achieve.

## What is a seizure?

A seizure happens when ordinary brain activity is suddenly disrupted. A seizure can be described as an internal electrical storm. It is the consequence of abnormal, excessive discharges of nerve cells. It is this sudden unexpected loss of control that accounts for many of the misconceptions and the prejudice associated with epilepsy. Seizures are the symptoms of the disorder.

Common triggers can include missed medication, too much alcohol, lack of sleep, stress, and illnesses or fevers. Everyone is different and what affects one person may have no effect on another.

There are many different types of seizures.

## 1. Generalised Onset seizures

- Generalised Non Motor Seizures include typical and atypical absences.
- Generalised Motor Seizures include tonic-clonic, tonic, clonic, atonic, and myoclonic.
- Absences are staring spells lasting only seconds but consciousness is lost briefly.
- Tonic-clonic seizures have loss of consciousness and convulsive movements of the limbs. This is the type of seizure that most people think of when they think of epilepsy.
- Myoclonic seizures involve brief jerking of the whole body, or more often the arms or legs, but not always loss of consciousness.
- Atonic seizures are also known as drop attacks where the body suddenly loses tone, goes limp and falls to the ground.
- Tonic seizures involve stiffening of the whole body and the person will fall if not supported.
- Clonic seizures involve the jerking phase of a seizure by itself where the limbs may jerk without the tonic or stiffening phase happening first.

## 2. Focal Onset

Focal (formerly partial) seizures start in one part of the brain. Focal seizures divide into:

- Focal Aware (formerly Simple Partial) – the person may experience a range of symptoms including déjà vu, jerking movements, a taste or smell.
- Focal Impaired (formerly Complex Partial) – awareness is affected to some extent, symptoms vary. There may be confused behaviour and wandering.
- Focal to Bilateral Tonic Clonic (formerly Secondary Generalised) – seizures start in one part of the brain and spread to affect both sides to become a full tonic clonic seizure.
- Focal seizures may or may not affect consciousness (aware or impaired) and may or may not affect movement (motor or non motor).

## Potential Triggers

- Missed Medication
- Stress
- Lack of sleep
- Alcohol
- Skipping meals
- Emotional distress
- Stimulants such as drugs and energy drinks
- Physical activity

Epilepsy Ireland is a great resource for further information.

## Stroke

The stroke treatments that work best are available only if the stroke is recognized and diagnosed within 3 hours of the first symptoms. Stroke patients may not be eligible for these if they don't arrive at the hospital in time.

If you think someone may be having a stroke, act F.A.S.T. and do the following test:

**F** — **Face:** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

**A** — **Arms:** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**S** — **Speech:** Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is the speech slurred or strange?

**T** — **Time:** If you see any of these signs, call 999 right away.

Note the time when any symptoms first appear. This information helps health care providers determine the best treatment for each person.

Do not drive to the hospital or let someone else drive you. Call 999 for an ambulance so that medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room.

**For more information -**  
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/stroke/>

## Heart Attack

A heart attack is a life threatening event that happens when the coronary arteries that supply blood to your heart muscle suddenly become blocked.

If this blockage happens it causes damage to your heart muscle. You might also hear of a heart attack called acute coronary syndrome or myocardial infarction (MI).

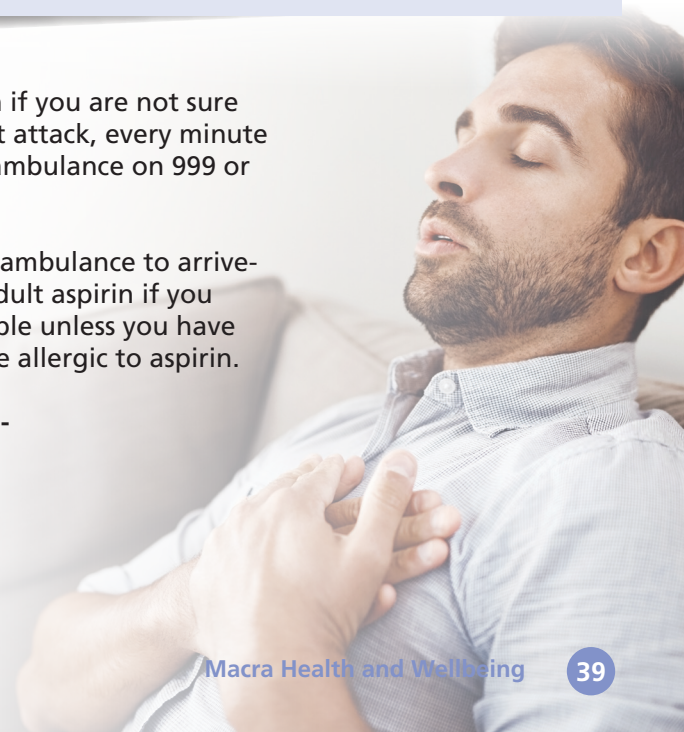
The most common symptoms include:

- Chest pain
- Upper body pain in the jaw, back, neck or arms
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Light-headedness
- Loss of consciousness
- Weakness
- Tiredness

In a heart attack, even if you are not sure you are having a heart attack, every minute can matter so call an ambulance on 999 or 112 (in Ireland).

While waiting for the ambulance to arrive sit and rest. Take an adult aspirin if you have one easily available unless you have been told not to or are allergic to aspirin.

**For more information -**  
[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)





## Free home STI tests

The HSE free home STI (sexually transmitted infection) testing service is available to anyone aged 17 or older who lives in the Republic of Ireland.

You can:

- order a home test kit online
- return your samples to the lab by post
- get your test results by text message or phone call

If you have symptoms of an STI or need urgent support, you should contact your local STI clinic or GP.

### STIs the kits test for

Our home test kits test for:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhoea
- HIV
- Syphilis

You may also get a test for hepatitis B or hepatitis C but they're not always needed.

### Order a test kit online

The provider we use for this service is called 'SH:24'.

You can order a test kit at [sh24.ie](https://sh24.ie).

If no kits are available, try again the next morning.

You will get a text message once your kit has been sent.

### Taking your samples

Your test kit will include:

- all the equipment you need to collect the samples
- instructions and links to videos on how to take the samples

If you have any problems, you can reply to any text from SH:24 and ask for help. A member of their clinical team will help you.

### Returning your samples

You will get a stamped addressed envelope with your kit. Use this to post your samples back to the lab.

You will get a text message when the lab gets your samples.

If there is a problem with your sample (for example, if it is damaged), you will be sent another test kit.

## Test results

If all your results are negative, you will get a text message with the results.

If you have a positive result for chlamydia or gonorrhoea, you will get a text message that shows the result. Your text will also explain how to get free care and treatment from an STI clinic.

If you have a reactive blood result for hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV, you will get a phone call with your results. If you have a reactive blood result for syphilis, you will get a text message with your results.

A reactive blood result doesn't always mean a positive result. It needs to be checked with a blood test taken by a healthcare provider. The SH:24 clinical team will explain this to you and refer you to a public STI clinic for assessment and testing.

**For more information - <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/sti-testing/home-sti-test/>**

This booklet was proudly created  
by Macra's three subcommittees





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