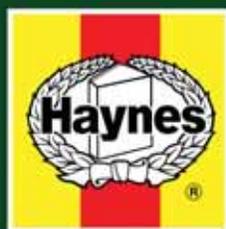


FIT FOR FARMING



A guide to men's health for Yorkshire farmers

A Men's Health Workshop Manual



Fully revised 2013 edition

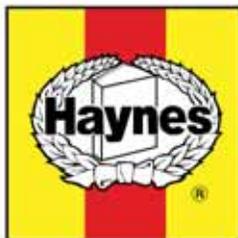


Warning:
Reading this may improve your health
malehealth.co.uk

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The Men's Health Forum's mini-manuals contain easy-to-read information covering a wide range of men's health subjects.

The Men's Health Forum's aim is to be an independent and respected promoter of male health, and to tackle the issues and problems affecting the health and well-being of boys and men in England and Wales.

Founded in 1994, The Men's Health Forum is a charity that works with a wide range of individuals and organisations to tackle male health issues. Well established and with an active membership, we work for the development of health services that meet men's needs and help men

take more control of their own health and well-being. Our members, partners, staff and trustees bring plenty of experience in health care, media, business and activity.

Registered office: Men's Health Forum, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH. Tel: 020 7922 7908

www.menshealthforum.org.uk

www.malehealth.co.uk (for fast, free, independent health information from the Men's Health Forum)

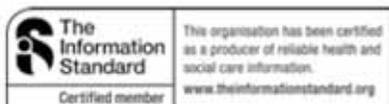
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The MHF encourages your comments and feedback:

www.malehealth.co.uk/MMfeedback

A full list of references used in this Mini Manual is available at: www.malehealth.co.uk/MMreferences



Yorkshire Rural Support Network

Yorkshire is a huge rural county, home to 5.3 million people. There is no doubt that the landscape is stunningly beautiful with coast, hills and moors as well as vibrant towns, cities and villages which makes it a popular destination for visitors.

However there are pockets of hardship, sometimes hidden from view, and our Network members endeavour to improve life for those in greatest need, in a quiet and practical way.

The Yorkshire Rural Support Network, based at the Great Yorkshire Showground in Harrogate and supported by The Yorkshire Agricultural Society, has been established for well over 15 years and has built up strong links between organisations dedicated to helping rural and farming communities.

We see the promotion of good health as a vital element of our work and we are delighted to be working in collaboration with the Farming Life Centre in Derbyshire to produce a new and updated version of our award-winning original 'Fit for Farming'.

Kate Dale

Coordinator

Yorkshire Rural Support Network

kated@yas.co.uk

01423 546217

Useful contacts

www.malehealth.co.uk

NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk

NHS LifeCheck – www.nhs.uk/lifecheck

5 A DAY – <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/5ADAY/Pages/5ADAYhome.aspx>

ALCOHOL

Drinkaware: Tel: 020 7766 9900, www.drinkaware.co.uk

NHS Choices – Alcohol: <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx>

Alcohol Anonymous Great Britain: National Helpline: 0845 769 7555, help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk, www.alcoholics-anonymous.co.uk

Back Care – Helpline: 0845 130 2704, www.backcare.org.uk

British Dental Health Foundation – www.dentalhealth.org

British Heart Foundation – Heart Helpline: 0300 330 3311 (9am–5pm Mon–Fri), www.bhf.org.uk, heartmatters@bhf.org.uk

Cancer Research UK – Nurse helpline: 0800 800 4040 <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org>

Change4Life – Tel: 0300 123 4567 (9am–8pm every day), www.nhs.uk/change4life

Dementia – Alzheimer's Society Helpline: 0300 222 11 22 www.alzheimers.org.uk

Diabetes UK – Tel: 0845 120 2960 (9am–5pm Mon–Fri), www.diabetes.org.uk, careline@diabetes.org.uk

Health and Safety Executive – Tel: 0845 300 9923 8:30 am–5pm Mon–Fri, www.hse.gov.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support – Free telephone help line: 0800 808 00 00 <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

NHS Choices – Healthy Eating – www.eatwell.gov.uk (<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx>)

SMOKING

Smokefree: Tel: 0800 022 4332 (9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat–Sun), www.smokefree.nhs.uk

British Lung Foundation: Tel: 03000 030 555, <http://www.blf.org.uk>

STRESS

Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mind: Tel: 0300 123 3393 (9am–6pm Mon–Fri), www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans – Samaritans Helpline 08457 90 90 90 (24 hours, 365 days a year) <http://www.samaritans.org/>

For confidential support via email: jo@samaritans.org.uk

Stroke Association – Tel: 0303 3033 100, www.stroke.org.uk

Drug/Substance use – Frank, Friendly, confidential drugs advice: Tel: 0800 77 66 00 (25 hours a day, 365 days a year), www.talktofrank.com

HELP FOR FARMERS

Farming Help 0845 367 9990
www.farminghelp.org.uk

The Farming Community Network (FCN)'s team of volunteers provide pastoral and practical support – helping people to find a positive way forward through their problems. In addition, FCN provides a confidential, national telephone helpline 0845 367 9990 (7am–11pm every day of the year).

Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) provides care and support (including grant support) for farmers, farm workers, farm managers and their dependents. It helps people of any age in times of crisis and those who are disabled ranging from young children to people over 100 years old. For confidential help and advice call RABI on 0300 3037373 (Monday – Friday, 9am–5pm).

Rural Stress Helpline offers a confidential, non judgemental listening service to rural people feeling troubled, anxious, worried, stressed or

needing information. It's a national helpline based within the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh Park in Warwickshire: 0845 094 8286 (Monday – Friday, 9am–5pm).

The Addington Fund provides homes for farming families in England and Wales who have to leave the industry and by doing so will lose their home. It also offers emergency grants in times of hardship. Tel: 01926 620135 (Monday – Friday, 9am–5pm).

Sexuality – Gay Farmer Helpline 07837 931894
www.gayfarmer.co.uk

Local Support in Yorkshire

Yorkshire Rural Support Network

Supporting rural communities throughout Yorkshire and based at The Regional Agricultural Centre, Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate HG4 2NZ 01423 546217 (Monday, Tuesday 9am – 5pm and answerphone)

Coordinator: Kate Dale (kated@yas.co.uk)

Fit for Farming

A guide to men's health for farmers

Contents

Foreword	2	Check-ups	14
Wellbeing	3	Sex talk.	18
Accidents	6	Ageing well.	19
Weighty matters	8	Cancer	21
Responsible drinking	10	Occupational Health.	26
Drugs and substance use	11	Getting the best from the NHS.	31
How to quit smoking	12	Useful contacts	Inside back cover

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The author and the publisher do not intend this book to be used instead of advice from a medical practitioner, which you should always get for any symptom or illness.

Foreword

The most valuable part of a farm is the people; without those hands working to feed the nation we all would be in a very sorry state. Any illness impacts on a family farming business, with the knock-on effects potentially travelling through the food supply chain. Irrespective of their farming roles, the farmer, his staff and his family play many other important parts – as parents, partners and respected members of society – and they should have the capacity to grow older in good physical and mental health.

The good news is that men generally are living 10 years longer than 50 years ago with many expected to live into their 80s. There is, however, a challenge with men who farm, as we are finding that many have problems they prefer to hide rather than tackle head on. We need to make sure they keep an eye on things so they can keep doing the things they enjoy – and age well. Though farming is an industry which continues to be resilient and responsive to the many challenges it faces on a daily basis, working under these conditions can take its toll on the health of the farmer. Working in isolation, in extreme weather conditions, with hard physical labour, animal disease, endless bureaucracy, fluctuating input costs and commodity prices that create financial pressures, can all have effects which may lead to personal health problems and mental strain.

This is why it is very significant that the Yorkshire Rural Support Network, supported by The Yorkshire Agricultural Society, and The Farming Life Centre based in Blackwell in Derbyshire, have revised, updated and added to the original 'Fit for Farming' guide to the health of farmers. In addition to all the original content this new edition has been expanded to include eye care, cancers, mental health, sex talk, the ageing brain/dementia and ageing well. This health manual is designed to give good solid advice that can help all those working on farms, providing the guidance they need to keep well and to age healthily. Whilst this booklet is ostensibly aimed at men, we acknowledge the supreme contribution made by women and young people and we hope they will also find much of the information useful and informative on a personal level.

Farming people should be able to make their own health a priority. We need a vibrant, creative and energetic UK farming community as we operate in global markets to feed a growing world population. Good health will be at the centre of success. It is essential that we are all 'fit to farm'.



Professor Alan White
Centre for Men's Health
Leeds Metropolitan University

Wellbeing

Farming can be a 24 hour job. Sometimes it seems there aren't enough hours in the day to do important things in life that matter to you, and these often get put on the back burner.

Many things affect the way we think and feel – home life, relationships and work hassle are just a few of them. When we feel things are going well we're 'on top of the world' and tasks seem easy. Throw in a financial crisis, extreme weather and a bucket load of red tape and the day-to-day grind can wear us down. All farmers deal with issues in their own way, but we can't ignore the fact that one in four will have a mental health problem.

How to help

Do you know someone going through a crisis?

Here are a few ways you can help them to cope:

- Stay in their life – be there and keep in touch; Facebook and other social media is useful too
- If they want to talk about a problem, just listen
- Ask what you can do to support them
- Remember, they're the same person you've known and cared about for years.



No one expects you to be an expert, but patience and time to listen can mean a lot to someone facing a crisis in their life. Leaving someone to speak freely and without judgement is a simple but effective way of getting the ball rolling.

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.

Most of us have experienced feelings such as being worried, being tense or feeling unable to cope. The good news is that there are things you can do to manage stress, at home and at work, with support from those around you.

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 including:

- Eating more or less than normal
- Mood swings
- Not being able to concentrate

4 FIT FOR FARMING

- 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.

Stress can be particularly bad for farmers because they are often working alone and may not get much chance to socialise.

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

- Back pain
- Indigestion
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Psoriasis (scaly skin)
- Migraine
- Tension headaches.

Help yourself

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

'Some of these Government agencies forget how many things we have to juggle, both on the farm and in the office. They just have one thing to think about.'

Talk it out

Dealing with stress alone is never a good idea. Just talking about things that are making you stressed may help you see things differently.

Talk to your friends or family

Talking to even one other person can help.

Talk with a health professional. You can speak to a doctor or practice nurse for advice and support, or see the list of useful contacts on the inside back cover.

'It's hard to get away from the farm. We don't employ anyone and there's stock to look after every day'

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: Taking time out from your normal routine may help. If you have young children try to organise a babysitter for an evening, or take it in turns with your partner to have time to yourselves. As for work:

- Try to avoid doing excessively long hours (easier said than done at some times of year!)
- Plan (and take!) a proper holiday in a quiet period of the year
- Take breaks away from your work area each day.

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: Plan relaxation time, even if it's just a long bath or listening to music. Try to get a good night's sleep. Avoid sleeping tablets as they can be addictive and make things even worse.

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 or sugar, as caffeine may make you feel anxious and sugar can cause mood swings.

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.

Suicide

An in depth study at the University of Oxford found that single farmers running a small farm without someone to confide in were most at risk of committing suicide. About 90% of farmers reported having a good social life but some people are out on a limb and feel isolated.

Who can help?

- Farm Community Network Helpline 7am – 11pm daily **0845 367 9990**
- No one should face a mental problem alone and MIND's advice line is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 6.00pm: 0300 123 3393. Their website is a great source of support and information www.mind.org.uk
- Samaritans are available to talk 24 hours a day 08457 90 90 90

If you are at risk of taking your own life and need immediate support phone 999 or go to your local AE department as a safe place.

For more information see www.malehealth.co.uk/stress

Accidents

Around 430 000 people work in agriculture, which includes farming and use of the countryside. This is less than 1.5% of the working population, yet agriculture has one of the highest fatality rates of all industries and is responsible for between 15% and 20% of all deaths to workers in Great Britain each year.

The total annual cost of injuries (in farming, forestry and horticulture) to society is estimated at £190 million and nearly all of that is the result of what the HSE calls 'reportable injuries'. Of this, fatalities account for around a third at £55 million.

What are the common causes of injury?



The most common causes of death are:

- transport - being struck by moving vehicles
- being struck by a moving or falling object, eg bales, trees etc
- falls from a height
- asphyxiation or drowning
- contact with machinery
- injury by an animal
- being trapped by something collapsing or overturning
- contact with electricity, nearly two-thirds of which involve overhead power lines.

There are many more injuries which do not result in death. The most common causes of non-fatal injuries are:

- handling, lifting or carrying
- slip, trip or fall on the same level
- being struck by moving, including flying or falling, objects
- falls from heights
- contact with machinery
- being injured by an animal.

People working in farming can also be permanently disabled by ill health. Breathing in dusts, handling loads, being exposed to noise or vibration, using chemicals and working with animals can all cause ill health with symptoms that can take years to develop. In some cases this can result in premature death.

In most other industries, deaths and injuries are decreasing but in farming the numbers have remained steady over recent years. Reasons for this include farmers having to work alone, using more powerful machinery and an ageing work force.

Accident prevention

Avoiding accidents is not rocket science and most farmers are more aware than anyone else of just how dangerous the farm can be. Accidents are usually a combination of things such as tiredness, pressure from suppliers, old equipment and familiarity with machinery, but none of these are helped by working with alcohol on board.

'Inevitably when an accident happens, it involves a family member or employee – it causes emotional turmoil and can have a devastating effect on a small family business'

Stress is a major cause of accidents on the farm and alcohol is often used to deal with it. Dealing with modern day farm equipment, along with the pressure from deadlines, government and EU regulations, makes it all the more important to take accident prevention seriously.

'Going to an HSE Safety Health Awareness Day helped to make me think about taking a moment to think first'.

You know how to avoid farm accidents better than anyone. It is simply a matter of putting this knowledge first, every time, always. It's not just you who could be hurt - keep an eye out for other workers and children playing too.

The HSE is urging farmers to make a promise to come home safe. Make your promise today. Do it for yourself, your family and your farm. The HSE runs Farm Safety and Health Awareness Days. Look out for one in your area. The HSE's website has a section dedicated to farming, with lots of practical guidance on improving the health and safety on your farm: www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/

Weighty Matters

Eating a well-balanced diet can seriously improve your health by:

- Keeping your weight down
- Lowering your blood cholesterol
- Preventing high blood pressure.

All of these lower your risk of getting heart disease, which is the single biggest killer, and help prevent things like diabetes and cancer.

See www.malehealth.co.uk/food

Fat facts

You do need to eat a little fat because it helps the body soak up and create some vitamins, boosts energy and forms the building blocks for hormones. But too much fat means too much weight.

- Look for foods that are lower in fat (check the label and go for fresh foods)
- Try not to eat fatty foods too often
- A plate of fish and chips now and again won't kill you, but eating high fat foods all the time can seriously damage your health
- Cut down on the fat you use in cooking. Grill, casserole or stew meat instead of frying it.

Boring? I'll eat my hat!

Eating well doesn't need to be boring. Eating a good variety of food makes sense and can be fun too. Basically you need:

- More fruit and vegetables
- Some starchy foods such as rice, bread, pasta and potatoes
- Less saturated fat, salt and sugar
- Some protein-rich foods such as fresh meat, fish, eggs and pulses.

Salt increases blood pressure

Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure. People with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke than people with normal blood pressure.

Tips to reduce salt:

- Eat home-cooked meals rather than ready meals when possible
- Use fresh fish and lean meat, rather than canned, smoked or processed meat (this will help reduce fat too)
- Go for food with low or reduced sodium levels or no added salt
- Cook rice, pasta and hot cereals without salt
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt when cooking.

Fruit and veg

Unless you have been hiding under a rock for the past few years you will know that eating plenty of fruit and vegetables is good for your health. Aim to eat at least five portions a day.



Heavyweight Facts

- Men with waist sizes over 40 inches are 33% more likely to die from cancer than those who are a healthy weight
- Two out of every five people in the United Kingdom have high blood pressure (which is often linked to being overweight)
- A person who is 12kg (about two stone) overweight is twice as likely to have a heart attack as someone who is a healthy weight
- Every year, 30,000 deaths are directly linked to obesity, and every 17.5 minutes a person dies of an obesity-related illness

How to measure your waist

Men with a waist size of more than 37 inches (94cm) have increased health risks.

Men with a waist size of more than 40 inches (102cm) have seriously increased health risks. Here's how to measure your waist:

- Find the top of your hip bone and the bottom of your ribs
- Breathe out naturally
- Place the tape measure between these points and wrap it around your waist
- Make a note of the measurement.

Getting active - and keeping your weight down

Even if you eat the correct foods and have a healthy balanced diet, it is still important to be active and fit. Research shows that fitness is a strong measure of health and can lead to an improved quality of life. Being fit improves your overall health and reduces your risk of disease.

Around 100,000 UK men die every year before they reach even the age of 70. Lack of physical activity together with poor diet has led to more than 1 in 5 men in England now being seriously overweight. A further 40% are overweight. Diabetes linked to obesity is increasing fast. Diagnosed diabetes can be treated and managed but undiagnosed diabetes is a potential killer. Diabetes is also one of the single most common causes of erectile dysfunction (ED or impotence).

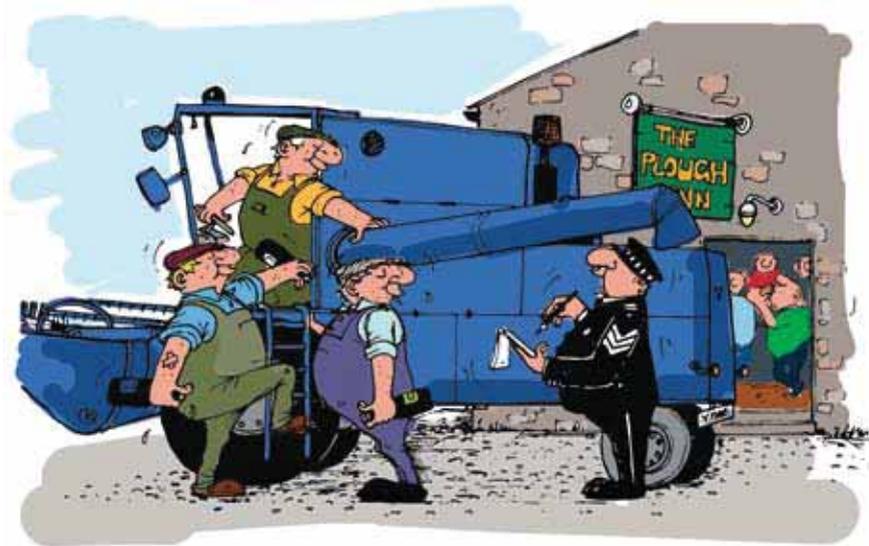
There's more on diabetes on malehealth.co.uk.

Responsible drinking

Some people are social drinkers; others might enjoy drinking at home. It's good to be in control of what you drink – try restricting it to 3-4 units a day (which is a pint of 5% beer) with at least a day off drinking alcohol each week.

Down the pub, try to get a designated driver sorted before you start drinking and you can always keep out of rounds if you want to control the amount you drink.

Remember to keep safe the next morning too - ensure you're legal when you drive or operate machinery.



If you find you're drinking more than usual or binge drinking you may be using alcohol for stress relief. Over time excessive drinking takes its toll, leading to increased weight, depression, memory loss and impaired sexual performance. There are plenty of other ways to deal with stress which are more fun and don't come with a hangover!

Drinking may affect your behaviour and relationships with others close to you too. Your drinking shouldn't become a problem to someone else, if it does then talk about it.

'Sometimes you just don't realise how much you've had to drink when the going gets tough'.

Drinking tips

- Walk to the pub to burn off some extra calories on the way
- Drink plenty of water, both during the day and when drinking alcohol
- Try to drink after a meal instead of before – you won't spoil your appetite and you won't feel like drinking so much after your meal
- Try reducing the strength of what you drink. For example, if you normally drink 5% beer, try 3.5% beer instead
- Try to have two alcohol-free days a week.

For more information and sources of help:

www.malehealth.co.uk/drinking

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Drinkline 0800 917 8282

Just how heavy is your drinking?

Large glass of wine (175 millilitres) 15%	3 units	120 to 170 calories
Small glass of wine (125 millilitres) 12%	1½ units	85 to 120 calories
Bottle of wine (750 millilitres) 12%	9 units	510 to 720 calories
Pint of beer 5%	3 units	180 calories
Pint of beer 3.5%	2 units	160 to 170 calories
Single measure of spirits (25 millilitres) 40%	1 unit	60 to 75 calories

For more information go to www.units.nhs.uk or call 0800 917 8282.

Drugs and substance use

There are many different types of 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 Frank on 0800 77 66 00, or check out www.talktofrank.com. The lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and offer translation services. Both the helpline and website also give confidential information and support for those worried about a friend or family member.

How to quit smoking

Most smokers - at least seven out of 10 - want to quit. Stopping smoking is the one single thing you can do to massively increase your chances of living longer. Once you've stopped smoking, your body will begin to heal within 20 minutes, repairing the damage done by all those years of smoking.



Half of all smokers will die early

Smoking is the single greatest cause of death in the developed world. It has killed more people than both World Wars put together - and still kills 114,000 people each year in the UK, commonly through lung cancer and heart disease.

Facts about smoking

- Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body, causing many diseases and reducing your quality of life and how long you live
- Smoking causes bronchitis, emphysema, heart disease, lung cancer and cancer in other organs including the lip, mouth, throat, bladder, kidney, stomach and liver
- One in ten moderate smokers and almost one in five heavy smokers (more than 15 cigarettes a day) will die of lung cancer.
- Half of all long-term smokers will die early as a result of smoking – half of these in middle age
- Smokers are at least 50% more likely to have erection problems.
- Breathing in other people's cigarette smoke can also cause these diseases.
- At 2013 prices, smoking 10 cigarettes a day costs you roughly £1,360 a year

It is never safe to breathe in other people's smoke. To protect yourself and your family from this you should ban smoking in your home and your car and avoid smoking in public places

What happens when you quit?

- After only 20 minutes of not smoking, your blood pressure and pulse return to normal.
- In just 48 hours, your body is nicotine-free and carbon monoxide is cleared from your system.
- Within 2 to 12 weeks, your circulation improves and you feel noticeably fitter.
- Within 5 years your risk of lung cancer will have dropped dramatically (and your risk may be halved by the time you reach your 10th year of being cigarette-free.)

Some people try to reduce their cigarette intake gradually. The trouble with this approach is that, as soon as something disturbs your concentration, the numbers tend to creep back up again. It's much better - and easier in the long term to give up completely in one go.

Make sure you are ready to give up. Many fail because they jump into the task before they are ready.

Ten tips to help you quit smoking

- Have a 'quit plan' and make use of all the sources of help; the NHS offers free help and support for people who want to stop smoking, and there are many other places you can turn to for help.
- Set a day in advance that you will stop - and tell all your friends, family and workmates so they can support you.
- Do it with a friend or colleague. If someone else gives up with you, you will reinforce each other's willpower.
- Clear the house (and your car, and desk, and anywhere else you keep them) of all your smoking materials - not just cigarettes, but lighters and matches, rolling papers, ashtrays, etc.
- Chew on a carrot - not just good for your health anyway (another of your 5-a-day), but it will also give you something to do with your mouth and hands.
- Ask your friends not to smoke around you (or at least pretend they're not enjoying it) - people accept this far more readily than they used to.
- Take things one day at a time, and mark your progress on a chart or calendar.
- Keep all the money you've saved somewhere safe - and then treat yourself with it
- Make use of any prescription or non-prescription aids available such as nicotine replacement therapies (your pharmacist or GP can advise you on this); or maybe try alternative therapies like hypnotherapy or acupuncture.
- Join a 'stop-smoking support group for professional advice and support from other people.

For more information and sources of help:

- www.malehealth.co.uk/smoking
- NHS Go Smokefree 0800 022 4334 (www.smokefree.nhs.uk)
- Action on Smoking and Health - www.ash.org.uk
- Quit - www.quit.org.uk

Check-Ups

You make sure your car and farm vehicles are in good working order - do the same for yourself with a Man MOT!

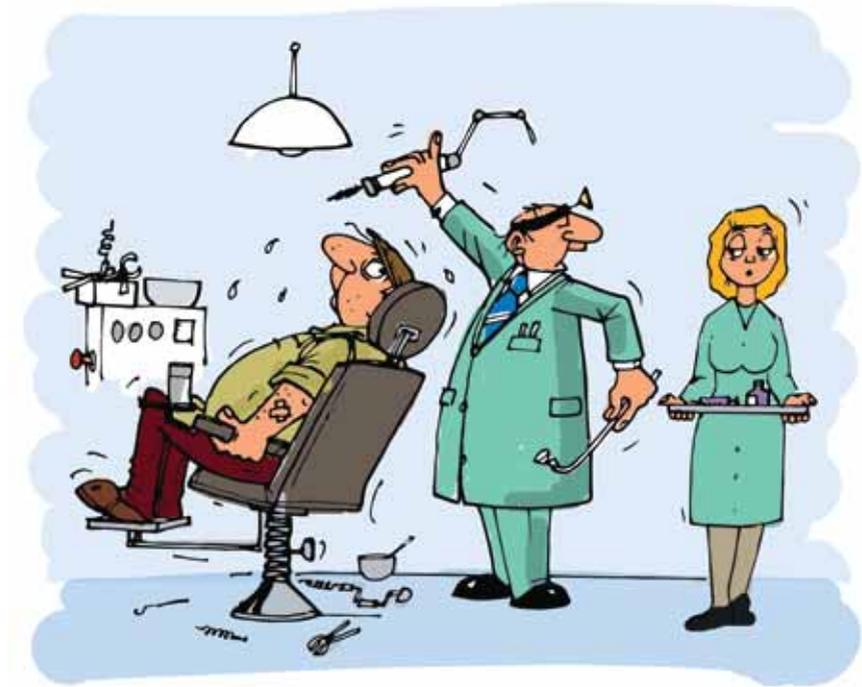
NHS Health Check

If you're aged between 40 and 74 your GP will write to you every five years and offer you a Health Check. This check involves some routine tests that will help identify your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and type 2 diabetes.

'I was really glad I had a health check at the Mart - I had no idea my blood pressure was so high'.

Mouth Matters

It can be difficult to find time to get to a dentist and it's not exactly the first thing you want to do. However, most things that go wrong in your mouth can be prevented. Getting a check-up can avoid a lot of pain and even unnecessary extraction. And it's not just your mouth that will benefit - dental decay may increase your risk of heart disease.



Tooth decay and gum disease

Sugary foods or 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. When older people lose their teeth, most do so because of gum disease. Smoking also causes gum disease. Preventing all this is quite simple:

- Brush your teeth and gums every night and morning with a fluoride toothpaste. And spit but don't rinse to keep the fluoride working after brushing.
- 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 ulcers

These can really be a pain, especially when eating or drinking. You can get rid of most ulcers with some corticosteroid cream or a mouthwash from your pharmacist. See your doctor if there is no improvement after a few days.

Mouth cancer

Men are more likely than women to develop 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:

- A lump or sore on the lip or in the mouth which doesn't go away within a few weeks
- Lumps or pains in the neck.

Early diagnosis is critical - go and see your doctor or dentist as soon as possible.

Eye Care

It is easy to neglect our eyes because they rarely hurt when there is a problem.

An eye test is about much more than getting a pair of glasses or contact lenses. It can help to detect a range of conditions.

In your 40s eyesight starts to change. Blurred near vision (presbyopia) affects everyone sooner or later. Don't panic – get an eye test so you can get the right eyewear for you. In your 60s regular eye checks are even more important.

Look out for free eye test vouchers in your local press.

Wear the right protective gear (glasses, goggles or face shield) for the tools you're using and work you are doing.

Ear Care

Hearing deteriorates with age: around 42% of over 50 year-olds in the UK have some kind of hearing loss.

Wear ear protectors when appropriate and let your ears rest after being exposed to unavoidable noise. See your doctor if your hearing is getting worse.

Action on Hearing Loss offer a hearing test online or via the telephone - www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk or call 0844 800 3838.

Wax is a common cause of reduced hearing especially when water gets trapped behind it. See your GP. Do not stick anything in your ear!

Care for the back, shoulders and knees

If you've ever suffered from a bad back you'll know just how painful and restrictive it can be – and because other people cannot 'see' the pain it tends to get little sympathy. But bad backs are also one of the greatest causes of sickness-related absence from work.

The good news though is that back pain is rarely serious and the best advice is to keep moving and stay active. If your job involves lifting heavy objects or sitting at a desk (and farming today usually involves both), checking your back makes good sense. Chronic back pain can result from bad posture, poor lifting technique or accidental injury.

Being overweight is also a major cause of back problems, not least because it can reduce activity and flexibility, but also because it also puts added strain on the muscles, ligaments and bones of the spine. Smoking can also significantly reduce bone strength – which is another good reason for quitting.

Adult bone is constantly being altered and renewed. This needs plenty of calcium. The body can only store this vital mineral in the bone itself, so fresh calcium is needed on



a daily basis. The best sources are dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, but bread is also good as are fish (such as sardines) with edible bones and green leafy vegetables. You should include some of these foods in your meals as a matter of routine.

It's not enough just to eat plenty of calcium, as the body needs vitamin D to help take calcium in from the stomach. Sunlight converts an inactive form of vitamin D into the type which does this. You need a healthy balance between too much sun (which can cause skin cancer) and too little (which can cause bones to become thinner).

Bones are not the only cause of pain. The back is supported by hundreds of different muscles including those that also support the arms, legs and head. These range from enormously strong muscles seen over the back to those inside the body. All of them can be strained or overworked leaving the spine vulnerable to damage – in fact, most back pain comes from injured muscle or tendons rather than the spine itself.

Looking after your back

When standing for long periods

- Head – keep it up and in line with your spine
- Shoulders – relax and pull in your shoulder blades
- Pelvis – keep your hips level while tucking-in your tailbone to line up with your spine
- Knees – keep slightly bent (not locked)
- Feet – share the weight evenly.

When driving

- Head – use a head restraint at all times
- Lower back – adjust the seat (or use a small cushion) to give maximum support, and sit well back without slouching
- Arms – slightly bent
- Legs – adjust the seat for ease of reaching the pedals (while allowing maximum visibility)
- Take a break – when stopped at the lights, relax by taking your hands off the wheel and bending your legs.

When lifting heavy objects

- Keep your back straight and use your legs to take the strain
- Know your limits, if it's a two-man job then don't be a one man bad back. It's not always just weight but also the awkward shape or location of a load that can cause problems
- Make sure you can deal with the shape, clear the area and warn people before you attempt a lift. If equipment is being used by someone else, wait until it is free – machines are easier to repair than people.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis occurs because joints have been continually stressed over the years and it can affect your knees, hips, fingers, and lower spine region. Farming for 10 or more years increases the risk of having osteoarthritis 9 times.

If necessary knees and hips can be replaced with artificial ones. Talk to your doctor.

Sex Talk

Safe Sex

Perhaps they used to offer you 'something for the weekend' at the barber's shop years ago. Much has changed, but the importance of keeping yourself and your partner safe and protected remains the same. You'd be wrong to think it's just the youngsters who are at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and diseases, such as AIDS and HIV: the rate of STI's has doubled in the over 45 age group in recent years.

Researchers now know that some types of oral cancer are linked to Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection in the mouth and throat. It's twice as common in men as women, and is most common in men in their 40s and 50s. The under 25s are at higher risk of contracting chlamydia and the NHS recommends that everyone in this age group has an annual check with their GP.

It goes to prove, whatever your age, be safe and use a male condom or another barrier method. If you want advice or think you may have contracted something, don't hesitate to see your GP.

Sexuality

We're all different and free to express our sexuality - it's an important part of who we are. A helpline has been set up specifically for farmers wanting support or information about sexuality: 07837 931894 (www.gayfarmer.co.uk)

Erections

As men age, it's very common to notice changes to your erection. About half of men between the ages of 40 and 70 will experience erectile dysfunction (ED or impotence) to some degree. It can happen to anyone.

It may indicate there are other things going on in your body or your mind too. For example, high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes reduce the blood flow to the penis just as they do to the heart. So ED could be a sign of heart disease. Or perhaps you've got something on your mind - concerns about your relationship or other things affecting the way you feel about yourself.

If you have erections at times other than during attempted intercourse - at night or when masturbating - you may have something on your mind rather than a physical problem. Whatever the cause, seeing the doctor is the best way to deal with it. They can diagnose and in recent years treatment has improved enormously: most men benefit and continue to have pleasurable love lives.

See www.malehealth.co.uk/toolkit

The male menopause

You may have heard the term 'male menopause' or 'andropause' used to describe feelings of fatigue, libido loss, sexual difficulties, depression, irritability, aches and pains, sweating and flushing that can occur in men as testosterone levels decrease with age. Most men don't require treatment but talk to your GP if you're concerned.

Ageing Well

On the average farm, the boss's age is 55. Many continue to farm into their 70s and beyond, so it's important to age well.

Despite our youthful approach to life we can't hold back time. The ageing process is likely to affect your body, but it is possible to maintain and improve health and mobility with the right approach to healthy living.

Over time ageing increases your likelihood of:

- Increase in weight
- Diabetes
- Sight deterioration
- Arthritis
- Reduced mobility

On the bright side, think of your personal achievements and how much knowledge and experience you've gained over the years - this is the benefit of age.

The Prostate

Only men have a prostate gland. It's round and about the size of a golf ball. It is in the pelvis, against the base of the bladder.

The prostate surrounds the urethra – the tube that runs from your bladder down inside your penis to the outside (you urinate through it). Imagine the prostate as a fat rubber washer around a bit of tubing. It grows to adult size during puberty. In most men it also begins to grow again in early middle age, which can cause problems which are quite common.

There are two possible causes of an enlarged prostate: benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH) – a benign (non-cancerous) enlargement of the prostate gland common in men over 50 – and prostate cancer. The symptoms are very similar and are usually related to problems urinating, such as the following:

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

Other symptoms can include the following:

- Lower back pain
- Pain in your pelvis, hips or thighs
- Erection problems

- Blood in the urine – this is rare
- Pain when you ejaculate
- Pain in your penis or testicles.

It is important that you know that any of these symptoms can also be caused by problems which are nothing to do with prostate cancer. If you are concerned about any symptoms that you have, visit your doctor.

Enlarged prostate (BPH)

BPH rarely causes symptoms before the age of 40, but more than half of men in their sixties and as many as 90% in their seventies and eighties have some symptoms of BPH.

As the prostate enlarges, tissue layers surrounding it prevents it from growing evenly, and pressure then squashes the urethra like a clamp on a garden hose. As a result, the bladder wall becomes thicker and irritated, shrinking even when it contains small amounts of urine, causing you to urinate more often. The bladder will eventually weaken and lose the ability to empty itself, trapping urine inside. The urethra becoming narrower and the bladder not emptying completely cause many of the problems linked with BPH.

Some men with very enlarged prostates might not suffer while others with less enlarged prostates can have more problems.

The problem can be treated with drugs or by surgically removing the enlarged part of the prostate. There is a small risk that either treatment may cause erectile dysfunction (being unable to get and keep an erection). You can speak to your doctor about this.

The ageing brain

Ageing may affect how your brain works too. It's called 'cognitive function' and sometimes this can be impaired due to depression, infection in the body or stress, but as we grow older it may be due to the onset of dementia. There's a general term 'dementia'. The most common type is Alzheimer's but you know there are over 200 different types in total?

You might think forgetfulness, misplacing things and repeating stories are clues to the first stages of dementia. But there may be other reasons for this, so it is important to seek help as soon as possible. Recent studies found that a quarter of people showing these signs went on to improve and others diagnosed with dementia benefit from early diagnosis and treatment that can delay its development.

Dementia can have a stigma attached to it like cancer used to have. Many people and their families may be fearful of a diagnosis or think it is not serious enough to seek help, but it is important to get intervention as early as possible. A quarter of people over 70 have dementia and your chances of developing it increase with age. Dementia might occur as a result of other conditions like strokes and heart disease. You probably wouldn't notice any changes to a friend in the early stages of dementia and it's important to treat people with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Cancer

Bowel cancer

Bowel cancer is a disease of the large bowel (colon) or rectum. It is also sometimes called colorectal or colon cancer.

- It is the second largest cause of cancer deaths in the UK
- In 2010 there were 40,700 new cases of bowel cancer in England (110 people a day) and some 15,700 deaths (43 people a day)
- Around one in 14 men will get bowel cancer at some point in their life and 1 in 19 women.

The definite cause of bowel cancer is still a mystery. But we know some things do increase your risk. Your risk is higher if:

- You eat lots of junk food, fat and sugar and not enough fibre
- You eat lots of burnt food
- Someone in your close family had bowel cancer
- You don't exercise
- You're overweight
- You smoke tobacco.

The good news is you can reduce your risk, even if bowel cancer is in the family.

- Reduce fats and sugars in your diet and eat more fruit, vegetables and fibre
- Keep your weight under control
- Discuss your family history with your doctor
- Quit smoking.

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, including:

- A persistent change in normal bowel habit, such as going more often and diarrhoea, especially if you are also bleeding from your bottom
- Bleeding from the bottom without any reason
- A lump in your tummy or back passage felt by your doctor
- Pain that affects your appetite
- Unexplained iron deficiency
- Unexplained weight loss
- Unexplained extreme tiredness.

If you have any of these symptoms for four weeks you should go and see your GP. Of course, these symptoms are often not caused by cancer but it makes sense to check it out.

If you do have bowel cancer, treatment will depend on where the cancer is, whether it has spread and your general health. Surgery is the main form of treatment, but more doctors are combining it with chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme offers screening every two years to all men and women aged 60 to 69. At the time of writing, this age range was being extended to 74.

You are sent a testing kit to complete at home. The kit is then sent off to a laboratory. It detects hidden blood in the stools, which could mean bowel cancer. About two in every 100 people doing the test will have a result requiring more investigation and may be invited to go for a bowel examination (colonoscopy) at a local screening unit. Research has shown that regular bowel cancer screening can reduce the risk of dying from bowel cancer by 16%.

Where can I get further information?

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Cancer Research UK

0808 800 4040

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/>

Beating Bowel Cancer

nurse@beatingbowelcancer.org

08450 719 301

www.beatingbowelcancer.org

Bowel Cancer UK

0800 840 35 40

www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support

Free telephone help line:

0808 808 00 00

<http://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

Men's Health Forum

www.malehealth.co.uk

NHS Cancer Screening Programmes

www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk

NHS Direct

111

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Skin cancer

The sun damages your skin through its ultraviolet radiation (UV). Tanning is a sign that damaged skin is trying to protect itself from the sun's ultraviolet rays. As you might expect, farmers suffer skin cancer more than people with indoor jobs.

There are basically two types of skin cancer. Non-melanoma is the most common form. Watch out for:

- A new growth or sore that does not heal within four weeks
- A spot or sore that continues to itch, hurt, crust, scab or bleed
- Constant skin ulcers that are not explained by other causes.

These are commonly found on the forehead and on the tip of the chin, nose or ears – in other words: the exposed bits.

Malignant melanoma is the more 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. Watch out for:

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



Many skin changes are harmless but a quick check with your doctor or pharmacist can save your skin.

Sun Smart Tips

- If possible, seek shade when the sun is strong
- Wear a t-shirt and long shorts made from closely woven fabric
- Slap on a hat. A big hat (that covers ears, neck and nose!)
- Slap on sunscreen with SPF 15+ every 2 hours
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes.

Sunscreens and smokescreens

Its easy to get confused about sunscreen – and consequently easy to damage your skin by choosing the wrong one or not using enough.

Read your sunscreen label and make sure it has both an Sun Protection Factor (SPF) and a star rating. The SPF tells you how much protection you are getting from UVB rays. The star *** rating shows the level of protection against UVA rays. Try to buy a sunscreen that is at least SPF 15+ and has a 4 star rating.

Remember! Sunscreen only offers some protection - use it in conjunction with cover-up clothing.

Not a lot of people know this

- Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the UK and not just in women
- Your lifetime risk as a man of developing skin cancer is one in eight
- Even on cloudy days you may be exposed to up to 90% of the dangerous UV rays
- Some football shirts are so thin they let almost all the sunshine through
- Skin damage builds up under the skin just like rust under bodywork paint and can come back to haunt you in later years
- Virtually all the risk comes from the sun... so cover up and close up!

Prostate cancer

There is general information about the prostate above.

Men who have a close male blood relative, especially a brother, with prostate cancer seem to have an increased risk of getting it.

The Western diet of highly refined food with a high animal fat content also seems to increase the risk of developing prostate cancer. There is no firm evidence of how to reduce the risk of prostate cancer. We do know that having a healthy diet with more fruit and vegetables, less red meat and more fish is good for reducing the risks of other cancers, heart disease and possibly prostate cancer.

It is important to be clear – not all men get symptoms that show they have prostate cancer. In the men that do, not all men have exactly the same symptoms. You do not have to have all the symptoms listed to have prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is treated in several different ways, which can depend on how aggressive the cancer is, whether it has spread elsewhere in your body and how old you are. Your general state of health may also make a difference.

You can speak to your doctor about your options.

Testicular cancer

Testicular problems are quite rare, and testicular cancer is the most serious. It represents only 1% of all cancers in men, but it is the single biggest cause of cancer-related death in men aged between 18 and 35.

Symptoms of testicular cancer:

- A lump on one testicle
- Pain and tenderness in either testicle
- Discharge (pus or smelly goo) from the penis
- Blood in the sperm when you ejaculate
- A build-up of fluid inside the testicular sac (scrotum)
- A heavy dragging feeling in the groin or scrotum
- An increase in the size of a testicle
- An enlargement of the breasts, with or without tenderness.

Preventing testicular cancer

For once, men are positively encouraged to check themselves, but this time to do more than just 'check they're still there'. Self-examination is the name of the game.

Check your testicles every month like this:

- Do it lying in a warm bath or while having a long shower, as this makes the skin of the scrotum softer
- 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. Check for any lumps or swellings as they should both be smooth. Remember that the duct carrying sperm to the penis, the epididymis, normally feels bumpy. It lies along the top and back of the testis.

Checking your testicles too often can actually make it more difficult to notice any difference and may cause unnecessary worry.

Occupational Health

Organophosphates (OPs)

Between 1988 and 1991 it was compulsory for sheep farmers to dip their sheep using pesticides containing OP's, and they are still widely available in agriculture. Recently scientists have concluded that low-level exposure to OP's can result in lasting brain damage. If you suffer flu like symptoms after handling OP's it could be a sign of exposure.



Farmers' Lung

Farmers' Lung is caused by inhaling mould spores. These spores are so tiny that they are easily absorbed and work their way into the smallest lung cells as you breathe.

Symptoms include a dry cough, flu-like aches and pains and eventually shortness of breath. These symptoms are not unusual in winter but if they persist you should visit your doctor. Make sure you tell your GP if you have been exposed to dusty forage.

If you ignore the problem then you run the risk of further contamination which can lead to chronic chest trouble and the development of scar tissue. This causes irreversible damage and permanent shortness of breath.

Prevention is the key:

- Avoid using mouldy hay, straw or grain. If you have to, then disturb it as little as possible
- Always wear a mask – this can make all the difference
- Keep dust exposure to a minimum by keeping barn doors open when working with hay and straw
- Keep your back to the draught to lessen chances of inhalation.

Asbestos

Asbestosis is a serious, long-term lung disease caused by inhaling asbestos dust and can take 20 years or more to develop – so ill-effects are not instantly traceable to asbestos.

There are three main types – often called white, brown and blue asbestos. The use of blue and brown asbestos (the two most dangerous forms) is totally banned by law. Rural buildings still have large amounts of this natural mineral, which was so attractive because of its fire-retardant properties and easy working.

Around 4,000 people in Great Britain die each year from mesothelioma and asbestos-related lung cancer as a result of past exposure to asbestos.

The main symptoms of asbestosis are:

- Increasing breathlessness
- Coughing
- Chest pain
- A feeling of tightness in the chest.

Prevention:

- Wear the correct protective gear and don't take contaminant home
- Use a shower after working.

What should I do if I'm worried?

If you think you've got occupational lung disease (through asbestosis or farmers' lung) you must talk to your GP. Give details of your symptoms, your job and the materials that you work with. You will almost always need to see a lung specialist at a hospital for a full diagnosis. They will do some tests. These may include a chest X-ray, blood tests, and detailed lung function tests.

Infections from animals and insects (Zoonoses)

Zoonoses are diseases that are passed from animals to humans. Micro-organisms such as bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses can cause illness by infecting the body when they are breathed in, swallowed, or when they penetrate the skin through small cuts or grazes.

Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis)

Leptospirosis is a serious disease which affects rats, pigs, cattle, dogs and humans. We can become infected through contact with infected urine, water or milk. The disease organisms penetrate broken skin or mucous membranes (e.g. the mouth). Often there are no visible symptoms in infected animals. The most serious form of the disease is spread by rats.

In humans flu-like symptoms may occur, but in most cases symptoms are more severe and can include jaundice (yellow skin and eyes, brown urine), kidney disease, meningitis, skin rashes and changes to other internal organs.



- If there are rats around, set traps or put down poison
- Cover up cuts and abrasions and always wash well before eating or handling food
- If you visit the doctor with flu symptoms, ask about Leptospirosis. Blood tests are available and Leptospirosis can be treated using antibiotics. It is better to seek advice early rather than wait until irreversible harm has taken place.

Ticks

Ticks feed by perching in low vegetation and waiting (questing) for a susceptible host on which they can attach and feed. Ticks can carry Lyme disease. Early symptoms may include fever, headache, fatigue, depression, and a circular skin rash. Personal strategies include:

- avoiding grassy areas with shrubs that attract ticks,
- wearing white or light-coloured clothing so that attached ticks can be seen easily and removed,
- tucking trouser legs into socks and
- walking in the centre of paths to avoid vegetation on which ticks lie in wait of a host.

If a tick is found on the skin, it should be removed by gently gripping it as close to the skin as possible, preferably using fine toothed tweezers, and pulling steadily away from the skin. Do not use a lighted cigarette end, a match head or volatile oils to force the tick out. Some veterinary surgeries and pet supply shops sell inexpensive tick removal devices, which may be useful for people who are frequently exposed to ticks.

Insect stings

You cannot always avoid getting stung, but in rare cases there can be a serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Any difficulty with breathing after a sting needs urgent medical attention.

Toxoplasmosis

A pregnant woman should avoid lambing ewes because of the risk of infection to both herself and her baby.

Animals that have aborted and the aborted products are especially dangerous to pregnant women. During the first three months of pregnancy the foetus is less susceptible to the disease, but if infection does occur, abortion or stillbirth may result. If the infection occurs later in the pregnancy the baby may be born with serious health problems. Milder forms of damage may only become apparent in later life.

Listeriosis

Listeria bacteria are present in the dung of infected sheep. They survive in the soil and can grow at low temperatures.

The source of human infection is unclear but is probably contaminated food and milk. The bacteria can continue to grow in partially refrigerated food. Silage may also be contaminated.

Listeriosis is generally only a danger to pregnant women, who should avoid sheep, especially at lambing time.

Orf

This is a viral condition usually caught from sheep or goats. It may occasionally be acquired from cattle or even from dogs that have been fed un-skinned carcasses.

The animals have painful blisters and scabs around the mouth, nostrils and ears. It is usually transmitted to the farmer when working with the animal. After a period of three to six days a single red painful lump appears on the hand or forearm. This goes on to form a blister and may become infected with other common bacteria and develops an abscess or a spreading red painful area.

The Orf itself is a virus and therefore will eventually disappear of its own accord. The doctor will treat any secondary infections. Once infected, lifelong immunity will follow.

- Wear gloves when handling infected animals
- Do not scrape off the scabs
- Do not use veterinary foot spray on human wounds and blisters. This can cause a severe reaction
- Keep blisters clean and covered to avoid cross-infection.

Cryptosporidiosis

Cryptosporidiosis is transmitted from a parasite picked up by touching livestock, animal housing, or feed. It can cause diarrhoea in humans, and be particularly severe in young children.

Q fever

This is caught mainly from cattle and sheep, but it can also be carried by other mammals, including deer. It leads to acute illness with feverish symptoms and occasionally pneumonia and other complications.

E. coli

An organism that may be present in animals and can also affect visitors to farms is the verocytotoxin producing bacterium *E. coli* O157 or O26. This can cause serious illness, especially in young children and the elderly in whom symptoms may include bloody diarrhoea and kidney failure.

Tetanus

The bacteria enter the body through cuts in the skin. You are more at risk of developing tetanus if the wound is deep or if it gets dirty with soil or manure, but even small wounds, such as a prick from a thorn, can allow enough bacteria to get in.

The bacteria release a toxin which then causes tetanus. The illness can take 21 days to develop. Tetanus affects your nerves and can be fatal.

Tetanus is quite rare because many people are vaccinated against it. This vaccine enables your body to create antibodies which protect you from the illness if you were to become infected with the bacteria.

The only way to prevent tetanus is to be immunised. A full course of tetanus immunisation consists of five doses of vaccine.

All children are routinely offered immunisation. As an adult, if you are not sure whether or not you have been fully immunised, see your GP or practice nurse. They will be able to advise you about having a 'catch up' injection.

Getting the best from the NHS

Almost all health problems can be more easily and successfully treated the earlier they are caught. Consult your GP as soon as symptoms develop and take advantage of any check-ups offered.

Don't get caught in the web

Buying drugs from illegal internet sites is potentially very dangerous. Almost all such drugs are at best fake and useless, at worst harmful. You may also have your credit card details stolen as well. More important is the danger of not getting a medical diagnosis. Erection problems won't kill you but linked diabetes or high blood pressure most certainly can. Always speak to your doctor or chemist first.

More than ever before, the NHS has a range of services that offer convenient options that allow you to get the right treatment at the right time, and at the right place. These services can make life a lot easier so visit www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk or phone 111.

Pharmacists: over the counter advice

Pharmacists 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.

NHS Walk-in Centres: a step in the right direction

At NHS walk-in centres, highly qualified NHS staff offer a range of convenient and free services, with no need to make an appointment. They also offer good advice, look after minor illnesses and injuries, provide prescriptions and even provide emergency contraception.

Look out for centres in railway stations, shopping centres or on the high street.

NHS 111

Call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. The NHS say NHS 111 is 'a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time'.

NHS Choices

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk), the country's biggest health website, is the online 'front door' to the NHS. It gives all the information you need to make choices about your health.

Doctors' surgeries

Doctors are generally available from around 8.30am to 6pm (or later). 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. Practices now often offer a huge range of services such as minor surgery, skincare, chiropody and even diabetic clinics.

Getting the best from your doctor

- Turn up. If you don't turn up for an appointment you can cause huge frustration.
- Write down your symptoms before you see your doctor. It's extremely easy to forget the most important things during the examination
Doctors will ask 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?
- You can ask questions too and don't be afraid to ask your doctor to give more information or make something clear that you don't understand
- 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.

Dentists

You will have to pay for dental check-ups and treatment unless you are at school, are pregnant or receive certain benefits. To find an NHS dentist in your area, go to www.nhs.uk.

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. Don't use it unless you have a genuine emergency.

They are open 24 hours a day all year, and are often 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.

First Aid Training

Undertaking some basic first aid training can make all the difference in an emergency situation, particularly if circumstances mean you're not able to seek help because you're away from the farmhouse or not able to get someone to help immediately. Look out for sessions run by organisations such as The British Red Cross, British Heart Foundation and Community First Responder Groups in your area – they may offer short workshops covering basic lifesaving skills – and often they take place in community locations such as village halls and pubs.