



Youth are facing a ticking time bomb!

From the food we eat, the environment we live in, to the medical treatment we receive, we are on a countdown to countless issues affecting our health and well-being.

Use NIPSA Youth's handy health diagnosis tool to focus on key health issues facing today's youth.

Health and Food

What's Up Doc?

The business industry's greed for profit means that they squeeze the quality of their products to minimum production standards. Today's agricultural methods increasingly strip nutrients from the soil in which the food we eat grows. Each generation of pest-resistant carrot is truly less good for you than the one before. Studies say we would have to eat 8 oranges to get the same nutrition as one from 1970.* This all involves not only people's health but their finances, job prospects and more.

Companies that mass-produce food use endless processing agents, (e.g. bleaching, degumming, hydrogenating and additive filling) which results in low nutritional content food products. After existing regulations failed to detect the horsemeat scandal for over a decade, the Tories' manifesto states that they intend to reduce the amount of meat inspections in the UK further.* This could lead to more infected meat in the food chain.

The Symptoms...

As a direct result of corporate greed, obesity, heart disease and dietary intolerances are all rising exponentially. Multinational corporations experiment with additives that make their food physically irresistible. They use market research techniques to create brand loyalties to this poor-quality food and to make their products of maximum visual attraction, all to monopolise the markets.

Conditions linked to bad diet (e.g. cancer and poor pre-natal development) are increasing. The rising cost of production means that companies cut corners, either by reducing the amount of a product or substituting expensive ingredients with cheap carcinogenic chemicals.

Due to malnutrition, more and more people have less energy and are less focused. Vegetables are being genetically modified and sprayed with increasingly harmful pesticides.* Animals are being kept in increasingly horrifying conditions, then given antibiotics and growth hormones. No one knows what the long-term impacts this behaviour will have on our health.

The Prescription!

We have the power to influence the markets that corporate decisions are based on. Manufacturers present us with this nonsense and, because the adverse effects are accumulative, we unknowingly continue to eat it. If enough people became aware and stopped eating foods with harmful additives, the manufacturers would remove it from their products to maintain profits.

We can lobby the government for better regulation on food and encourage education for people about harmful food and the associated health issues. We can spread ideas amongst the youth of today about growing their own food and choosing products that are organic, free-range or from pasture-fed animals.

Encourage your friends and family to eat an unprocessed fruit-and-vegetable-based diet. You cannot manufacture nutrition. Only the sun creates nutrition. Remember, you're not just eating for your taste buds; you're eating for nourishment, and your body needs an array of vitamins and minerals to stay healthy.

Health and Economy

What's Up Doc

UK national debt continues to accelerate. The distribution of wealth is becoming increasingly unequal. Minimum wage and prices do not match rises in inflation. This is forcing people to save less and increase their use of credit, and escalates levels of poverty. A rise in the number of food banks, pawnbrokers and pound shops clearly shows that people have less money but are more driven by consumerism.

Following wild speculative gambling in the banking sector, the economy crashed. To ease the deficit and bail out the banks, the government transferred private debt to the public and continue to denationalise our profit-making public services, such as schools, the Health Service and the Royal Mail.

The Symptoms

The link between poverty and poor health has been well proven. Fuel and energy costs continue to rise, and living costs are rising every day, from rent to repairs. The number of people currently in poverty has seen a tenfold increase in the need for food banks. Instead of assisting the impoverished, the government choose to cut benefits and social care provision. Rates of acute psychiatric care, substance abuse and criminality, arguably caused by inequality, are soaring in deprived areas*.

The poor economy means that infection rates are higher and people are increasingly intolerant to antibiotics. Health conditions such as bone disease and psychosis are a ticking time bomb for young people. When it blows, there will be little to no free healthcare. Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland is already partially outsourced and attempts to privatise services will continue under the impending Welfare Reform Bill.

The Prescription

You can read the compelling evidence in NIPSA's latest research publication: 'Transforming Your Care: Privatising Your Health Service'.

Northern Ireland has a devolved government and we have the campaigning power to bring about constructive change to stop welfare reform. Just like when our strength stopped direct rule Ministers implementing water charges, we can again summon the power of the movement to put forward and implement our own reforms for the betterment of the currently strained healthcare system.

Further, we need to renationalise services like employment and training, the banks and energy providers.

Health and Well-being

What's Up Doc!

People's working and social lives are becoming increasingly stressed. We are becoming more self-critical and self-obsessed. People use technology more and more and are becoming increasingly disconnected. With ever-increasing disconnectedness in our society, many young people are left feeling cut-off and alone in their challenges to cope with emotional unrest while juggling with everyday life.

The young face a new crisis: the internet. The media are misrepresenting the true state of the world. They try to squash solidarity and encourage the young to be self-centred consumers. Bullying on social media has become unmanageable, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to shield the young from the darker side of the internet.

Lack of physical activity causes 1 in 10 deaths!* According to the World Health Organization, cars cause the deaths of at least 1.3 million people a year. People no longer walk to their destination, with car usage rising year by year. Self-driving cars are expected on the market within 3 years.* Lack of provision for exercise and closure of local public leisure services are resulting in an even lazier lifestyle. People are exercising less and less, with excuses ranging from not having the time or the energy to it's too boring.

The Symptoms

The World Health Organization now has mental illness as one of the biggest health challenges of the 21st century. The relationship between the rise in mental stress and chronic disease is worrying. Studies reveal that stress plays a role in triggering or worsening depression and cardiovascular disease and impacts on our immune system. Rates of depression are mounting. Northern Ireland has the highest rate in the UK. With very little public care provision, the voluntary and community sectors are left struggling to cope.

Suicide is the biggest cause of death behind cancer and heart disease. Young people are increasingly disconnected. When social media platforms like MTV launched in 1981, it played music videos from the likes of The Beatles and Pink Floyd, who called for revolution, and showed progressive programming. Today, it shows very little music videos and is saturated with reality programming that uses people's embarrassment and real-life issues as entertainment. There are shows based on everything from driving lessons to working in call centres.

Physical activity is shown as the primary prevention against around 35 chronic conditions including obesity, type-2 diabetes, heart disease, depression and cancer. However, lowest-income households are most likely to have least active children and spend an average of £2 per week on sports. Studies show that lack of exercise can lead to heart disease more than smoking can. Physical activity makes you feel good about yourself, relieves stress, reduces feelings of anxiety and depression and lowers health risks.

The Prescription

NIPSA Youth is committed to changing the trend in poor mental health and challenging the stigma associated with it. We can work with employers to enable them to understand, protect and improve the mental health of young employees with an emphasis on prevention, early intervention and the development of partnerships with other organisations.

We believe in working together to dissuade people from buying into the neo-liberal policies that anaesthetise the nation with pharmaceuticals, technology and consumerism. We will work towards raising awareness of mental health issues and encourage better use of resources. A wide audience can be reached using online methods, help lines and counselling services. We will support recovery through lobbying the government to increase provision for peer-led centres and foster true ways to combat this increase in anxiety and depression.

Our well-being is vital to our living standards. Our A&Es, our libraries and our leisure facilities are being closed. People are finding it more difficult to exercise effectively. Private indoor play facilities for children and gyms for adults turn people into consumers. We need better use of outdoor space to encourage people to have a healthier technology/natural environment balance and to take more time to go outside.

We can forge links with other unions and, in solidarity, encourage young people to exercise, more. Programmes like @StreetGames, along with sporting events, such as the marathon and Giro D'Italia, encourage the young to take up new sports and exercise more.

Health and Work

What's Up Doc!

An increasingly demanding work culture and a rise in the cost of living mean that people are devoting more hours and energy to work and neglecting other important aspects of their life, such as exercising, parenting, healthy eating etc. Shift and night work only amplifies this impact on social relationships. With little or no time for relaxing, we are witnessing a rise in anxiety and sleep disorders, which are associated with heart disease.

Disabled people are being forced back into work under welfare reform. Nearly two thirds of employees have experienced a negative effect on their personal life, including lack of personal development, physical and mental health problems, poor relationships and poor home life.

The Symptoms

10.4 million working days per year are attributed to work related stress.* The Mental Health Foundation says that work is good for our health, but only when this balances with the rest of our lives. Sizeable groups of people are neglecting the factors in their lives that make them resilient to mental health problems. As health conditions are impacting on us at a younger and younger age, we are faced with working until we are older and older.

Back-to-work schemes affect not just health conditions but mortality rates. In the UK, over 10,000 people died within 6 weeks of being declared fit for work under the Welfare Reform Bill's back-to-work schemes.*

Many young people in catering and entertainment work are employed on zero-hour contracts. Evidence shows that the extent of employers abusing the rights of staff on these contracts is deplorable. This keeps people afraid, distorts employment figures and causes acute stress to the economy and people's health.

The Prescription

Encourage your colleagues to join NIPSA and push for better working terms and conditions. We have a successful history of protecting public services. The odds have been beaten and differences have already been made, simply by ordinary members practicing their right to campaign, such as with NIPSA's ongoing Equal Pay campaign.

We need to look to other areas of protection for members, such as supporting better parenting skills or raising awareness of the reliance on technology to the detriment of traditional skills. We need to keep the young from becoming reliant on technology. Traditional skills are not being passed on and memory is poorer as a result of relying on the internet.

Health and Environment

What's Up Doc!

Fresh air and water are critical for all life. Industrialisation, including mining, waste pollution and over-production, is slowly but inevitably destroying our natural resources and our environment.

Our climate is changing and our fossil fuel resources are running out fast. Money, power, greed and war mean that our air is polluted from Co2 and the forests that balance out air quality have been widely consumed or exploited.

Our sea levels are rising, as is their temperature and acidity. Marine life is dying due to increased levels of nuclear pollution and plastic waste. Cod is now on the endangered species list.* Fishing of certain species is limited, but there is evidence to show that the restrictions are not adhered to by trawling companies.

The Symptoms

Alongside rising production levels of coal, oil and gas are rising levels of premature death, acute respiratory illness, aggravated asthma and chronic bronchitis. The impact on the planet of humans means that the air is so poor, our health is suffering. Allergies are on the rise and studies show that city living results in a 9% increased risk of cardiovascular disease, just from breathing polluted air.

Through acidification, rises in sea temperature and overfishing, our seas are dying.* (For example, it takes 4kg of sardines to produce 1kg of farmed salmon). At current rates, it is predicted that over half of many forms of fish and coral life will be extinct by 2050.

Climate change has inflicted fierce punishments on humanity. We have seen increasingly sporadic weather, with increases in the frequency of tsunamis, earthquakes, floods and cyclones. The death, destruction, misery and resulting health complications for the survivors are unparalleled.

The Prescription

Just like with privatisation, the government are so short-sighted, they grasp only short-term gains. We are sitting on vast amounts of renewable natural energy but corporations refuse to invest in this green energy. NIPSA, as the largest trade union in Northern Ireland, can put a stop to further erosion of our environment (e.g. the plans for fracking in Fermanagh) and encourage investment in viable alternative energies, such as wind, tidal and solar power for long term sustainability.

We can each take pride in our environment. We already know that, if everyone makes one small change, it can have a huge impact on the environment. Due to the use of fridges, solvents and sprays through the 80s and 90s, we created an expanding hole in the ozone layer causing increased rates of skin cancer. Through changing public policy, CFCs were banned from products and, as a result, the hole is now almost closed. So, one less appliance, one less car journey and one less bath really can save our planet. Encourage change. Use homemade or concentrated products. Use refillable packaging and only buy sustainable fish and environmentally-friendly foods.

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