

There are many things that can cause poor health. And understanding them is crucial to preventing them. Our senior analyst David Lemon is back once again with the ill behaviour - or certainly how it can lead to an early death or poor health.



Unhealthy food: a moment on the lips, a day or two lost to poor health

By [David Lemon](#)

You're likely to be aware that things like pollution, eating rubbish food and not moving enough are bad for your health. But it can be difficult for us to say exactly how each of these things contribute to poor health. To try to answer that, we've used data from the 'global burden of disease' project. This is to try to understand the main contributors to poor health.

This is an international study that has collected health information from around the world. It uses this data to look at how things such as poor diet, air pollution and lack of exercise affect

health. We call these risk factors.

We've found that, across Dorset, there are about 9,500 preventable deaths a year. They are preventable because we know the risk factors and there is potentially something we can do about them. As a community, we could have prevented some or all of these deaths. The biggest risk factors for these are from poor diets (18%), tobacco (15%), and high blood pressure (11%).

As well as causing deaths, they can also contribute to poor health during life. We measure this through what's known as a disability adjusted life year, or DALY. One DALY represents the loss of one year of a person's healthy life. This could have been because the person spent it in poor health. Or it could be that they died one year early than would be expected. In one year, people in Dorset lose about 180,000 healthy years of life, which could otherwise been spent in good health. This is about 35% of all health years lost.

We can also look at how risks effect men and women. For example, the majority of deaths and DALYs lost from drug and alcohol use are from men. But women suffer almost all the deaths and DALYs that are attributed to unsafe sex and sexual abuse. This includes sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and resulting complications, such as cervical cancer.

But it's not all doom and gloom. We are generally healthier than the rest of England. For example, if the risk of death here was the same as the rest of England there would be 106 more deaths each year. There would also be 752 more years of life lost to poor health every year from high blood pressure alone.

Understanding what contributes the most to poor health in our communities is crucial. It will help us and our partners in the NHS and other local government departments use our money better.

David Lemon is a senior public health analyst for Public Health Dorset