

## **Men's health: a Manifesto**

- Men and health working group
- Training for men, Berne

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A great many people whose name is not mentioned here also helped in the preparation of this manifesto.

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## Why a manifesto?

The authors of this manifesto deplore the fact that a certain kind of “one-track” male behaviour can do so much damage to society and the environment. These same authors also wish to initiate a discussion and encourage as many people as possible to respond.

The specifically male way of looking at life

*(for example, success at all costs to the detriment of feelings)*

and of living it on a daily basis under today’s conditions represents a growing danger to public health.

We are certain that men can become aware of the damage caused by their behaviour and can put it right by taking responsibility for themselves, those close to them and the environment.

### *What do we mean by the word “health”?*

*Being in good health means among other things, being capable of coping with one’s emotions and developing one’s mental faculties and taking on a social role; being in good health is an essential condition for achieving individual, family or social aims. Good health enables the human being to live his life in a way that suits him and do what he has to do satisfactorily, which gives him self-respect, brings him satisfaction and gives his life meaning.*

*Good health also enables him to maintain friendships and family or social relationships in general. Each of us is capable of keeping ourselves in an acceptable state of health in the broadest sense of the word.*

*(Source: Ottawa Charter, WHO)*

## **A few facts about the state of men's health**

Over the last hundred years, our life expectancy has grown continuously. It has been women however who have benefited more from this evolution than men.

A century ago, the life expectancy of women and men was practically the same: in 1878, men lived an average of 40.6 years and women an average of 43.2 years. Since then, the gap has steadily widened. Today, the average age reached by men is 74, whilst women reach the age of 81.

Currently the biggest differences between men and women are due to the following illnesses and causes of death.

### **Up to the age of 65, men die**

- Five times more often than women of heart disease
- Three times more often than women in road accidents
- Approximately three times more often than women of AIDS
- Approximately three times more often than women of lung cancer
- Approximately three times more often than women from suicide
- Twice as often than women of cirrhosis of the liver
- 1.4 times more often than women from violence

Our "male" way of life not only puts our health at risk, but also that of women and children. Finally it is our society as a whole that has to bear the consequences of alcoholism, violence, stress and the deterioration of our environment.

The costs arising from the "male" way of life amount to hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

Some women have been increasingly tempted to adopt a typically "male" lifestyle. In the last few years, the difference between the average age reached by men and women has tended to lessen. These figures cannot be accounted for by a reversal of the trend in favour of men. The negative effects of certain types of behaviour, until recently typically masculine, are beginning to be felt. As with men, lung cancer is the most widespread cancer among women, as a result of smoking which is still on the increase. The number of acts of violence committed by women is also rising.

## The ins and outs

The behaviour described as being "male" is not physiological in origin and it can be modified. It is generally defined by the role played in society, and by his family, educational or professional situation. To paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, it might be said that "one is not born a man, one becomes one".

### The consequences

- Men are more likely to exceed permitted limits than women and therefore take more risks than women do (for example when driving);
- Men are unstable in the way they control their emotions (for example domestic violence);
- Men tend to ignore the distress signals put out by their bodies or certain symptoms (for example stress at work);
- Men take little care over eating in a healthy and balanced way;
- Men indulge in often pointless and self-destructive competition;
- In situations of conflict, men resort to violence, the abuse of power or war;
- Men are not good at dealing with frustration (lack of patience and perseverance);
- Men refuse to give in even when there is no way out of the situation;
- Men do not keep to a regular pattern with regards to rest and activity;
- Men's misplaced pride often prevents them from asking for and accepting help in critical situations.

*Behaviour which is damaging to health is often also a reflection of what is shown in the cinema, on television, in advertising and in certain kinds of music. Macho "heroes" always ready to pick a fight or to pull out a gun are often flanked by female police officers with a fag end in their mouths or by vengeful tigresses who convey this image of violence whilst passing it off as an emancipated attitude. It is therefore perfectly possible that some young women are modelling their behaviour on these fictional characters.*

## Identifying the needs and taking action

Everyone should feel concerned by the state of health of the male sex. If men wish to live healthily, they have to take radical steps to improve their state of health. This begins at behavioural level, with the way they operate in society or within organisational and political structures. We have to learn to see health as a valuable possession that has to be looked after and developed. We also need to try to devote our resources to the cultural, social, economic and ecological aspects of life. This means reducing the risks of damaging our health whilst promoting a respectful development of our environment in a sustainable way within society. Women need to develop enough good sense not to give way to typically masculine and destructive forms of behaviour.

### Identifying the needs in society as a whole

Society needs to begin to question the major values that determine our state of health, what attitudes are right and what standards. In future, society needs to look as deeply into what is "male" as it has into what is "female". This is why we support all the efforts that have gone into male-female equality in the private sector as in the public sector. As representatives of the male sex, we wish to focus attention on men's positive side and find solutions at a political level that can be applied to the whole of society.

For this reason we have identified the following needs:

1. Men's health needs to be discussed at the level of politics, scientific research and health promotion.
2. Specifically male characteristics need to be taken increasingly into account.
3. The necessary resources for implementing these actions must be provided.

### Questions we need to ask ourselves

The first step for each man consists in asking the following questions in a self-critical, careful and non-restrictive way.

- To what extent is my behaviour healthy or unhealthy? What are the specific points that benefit or, on the other hand, harm my health?
- How do I see myself?
- How can I take better care of myself?
- Can I live with certain imperfections?
- What about my excesses and my loss of control?
- How can I learn to turn aggression into constructive energy and perseverance, and how can this rule be applied in general?

- How are my relationship patterns constructed?
- What do I do to keep up friendships with other men?
- What do I do to promote solidarity among men?
- How do I see my role as a husband and father alongside my professional career?
- What do I do to expand my sense of community living?
- Can I decide to preserve my health to achieve a certain quality of life even if the conflicts between heart and mind are many and even if my career plans would suffer as a result?
- How far does my individualism go? Do I need to satisfy my need for power and/or my desire to assert myself at all costs?

*While good health is not everything in life, it does however contribute to making life better. Men need to take responsibility for themselves and for those around them. A creative man is one who does not hesitate to change his behaviour and who is able to live together fully with children, women and other men. This representative of the modern male sex has nothing to do with the backward-looking structures of the patriarchal society that put his health at risk. He wishes above all to participate in developing a society with a human face respectful of the values of life.*

# Time to challenge "male" behaviour patterns

## 5.1 . Man and his social relationships

<b>Spheres</b>	<b>"Male" behaviour</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>Myself</b>	The way he sees himself and perception of reality are often distorted.	<i>What can I do to improve my perception of things? What is needed for me to take this step seriously? What must I do to be more gentle with myself?</i>
<b>Partners</b>	Lifelong couple relationships are increasingly rare. Partners tend to be companions only for a period of life.	<i>Where do I stand in relation to the ideal of life that prevailed until recently, in other words a lifelong couple relationship? How can I learn to live alone?</i>
<b>Children</b>	The number of men without children is rising. Fathers are too often not there for their children.	<i>What must I do to take my responsibilities towards my children more seriously? How can I maintain a lifelong relationship with my children?</i>
<b>Other men</b>	The couple relationship can lead to neglect of male friends.	<i>How can I take better care of my relationships with my male friends? How can I be supportive to the male sex throughout my life?</i>
<b>Community</b>	The thirst for profit and power often significantly reduces one's sense of community.	<i>Am I capable of lending a hand for free for the good of the community or an association? How can I draw on new resources and energy for such voluntary help? How can I develop habits that benefit the community?</i>
<b>Environment and nature</b>	Men tend not to take ecological problems very seriously and or learn little from them.	<i>Do I want to keep nature intact as a life source rather than manipulate it? How can I do this?</i>

## 5.2. Subjects that are important in a man's life

<b>Spheres</b>	<b>"Male" behaviour</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>Periods of life</b>	His way of seeing things depends too much on the period of life being lived at the time.	<i>What can I do to increase my sense of well-being and my ability to enjoy life in the present? And in doing this, how can I leave room for my dreams? To what extent do I want to promote contacts between the different generations?</i>
<b>Sexuality</b>	Men are not very clear where they stand between sexual desire and the fear of impotence and homosexuality.	<i>How can I manage to experience sexual fulfilment without any fear?</i>
<b>Ageing</b>	The myth of eternal youth gets in	<i>What can I do to organise each period of</i>

	the way of the ageing process.	<i>my life in a well-considered way? What can I do to prepare myself for future periods of my life and to evaluate them?</i>
<b>Illness</b>	Men's relationship with illness is characterised by repression or a worst-case scenario approach.	<i>To what extent do I take the signals given by my body or the symptoms of illness seriously? What is my reaction? What do I actually do to prevent illness and to maintain my health?</i>
<b>Dependency</b>	Exceeding limits, overdoing things and very frequent loss of control of the situation.	<i>Is some of my behaviour destructive to me and to others? What can I do to remedy this?</i>
<b>Aggression</b>	Aggression and violence are used habitually by men, and they use it to establish their domination or to gain a certain amount of pleasure.	<i>What methods are there to be learned about channelling aggression and violence so that I can be more patient? How can these methods be promoted?</i>

## Man and his activities

<b>Spheres</b>	<b>"Male" behaviour</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>Work and creativity</b>	Men define their right to existence solely through work and performance.	<i>What is the purpose for which I work? What is it that makes me what I am or what I would like to be?</i>
<b>Politics and economics</b>	The fascination that power and money hold over men greatly influences their behaviour.	<i>What (alternative) forms of participation in political and economic life could I opt for? In the name of sexual equality and for the good of the community, am I ready to give up some of my power or must I still run after profit in an excessive way? What is my relationship with money?</i>
<b>Housework</b>	Men tend to offload housework by leaving it to women; if they do do any, it tends to be only the most "attractive". There is no profile of a "househusband".	<i>What stops me taking a greater share in the housework and from forming my own profile in this area?</i>
<b>Leisure and culture</b>	Leisure is a function of consumption and fashion ("shut up and shop").	<i>How can I find the right balance between the passive organisation and active organisation of my leisure time?</i>
<b>Sport and play</b>	Men either do too little sport (lack of physical movement), or they totally overdo it (excessive training, dependency, stress), or they go in for dangerous activities (going too far and enjoying taking risks).	<i>How can I go through life doing something for myself and for my health through sport and play? How can I avoid the traps of overworking and of too much ambition?</i>

## Background:

### The beginnings

The first attempts at tackling the question of "men's health" date back to 1989. They failed, notably for the following reasons:



**Information**

The various information centres in the realm of health had practically no literature on men's health.

**Funding**

In 1990, applications made to the Confederation and to the various foundations to fund a campaign and projects on this subject were rejected on the grounds that this was not a relevant question from the point of view of public health.

**The organisations**

There are no organisations traditionally concerned with male questions.

**The manifesto**

Since 1995 various workshops and projects have been carried out with the GwattTraining Centre. They formed the basis for the formulation of the manifesto on men's health which was presented to the public in April 2000.

**The "men's health" project**

Taking the manifesto as its basis, Radix Promotion de la santé developed a project in 1999 aimed at promoting awareness among the general public and in specialist circles in German-speaking Switzerland around the theme of "men and health". It is planned that this project be extended to other linguistic regions.

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