



# Press release

Statistics Netherlands

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## ***More heavy drinkers among men***

In 1998 more Dutch people drank alcohol than in 1995. The difference in drinking between men and women has not changed since 1989, but it is mainly men who continue to drink more. Men smoked more than women in 1998 too, but the differences in smoking behaviour between men and women are decreasing. New figures from Statistics Netherlands further show that the Dutch again bought more non-prescription medicines at chemists and pharmacies. The use of this medication has doubled since 1981, while the use of medicine available on prescription only has remained stable. Visits to dentists rose slightly in 1998, while visits to GPs and specialists have remained at the same level in the past few years.

### ***More drinkers***

In 1998 85% of the population aged over 16 drank alcohol occasionally, up from 80% in 1995. More men than women drink, 91% and 80% respectively, and the difference increases if we look at the amount of alcohol they drink. Heavy drinkers are people who drink six or more glasses of alcoholic beverage at least one day a week. According to this definition, one in five men (21%) are heavy drinkers, while only 6% of women belong to this group.

### ***Smaller difference in smoking between men and women***

It is a well-known fact that smoking damages health. In spite of this one in three Dutch people aged 16 and older smoke, a total of 4.3 million people. More men than women smoke, 39% versus 31%. The difference was larger in 1989, 44% of men and 31% of women. On average men smoked as many cigarettes a day as women in 1998

### ***Non-prescription medication continues to rise***

The use of medicines available from chemists and pharmacies without a prescription was again higher in 1998 than in previous years. Since 1981 the number of people who used this kind of medication in the fourteen days preceding the survey has doubled, from 16 to 33%. More women use non-prescription medicine than men: 37% and 29% respectively in 1998.

### ***Prescribed medication remains stable***

Again in the fourteen days prior to the survey, one in three people were taking at least one medicine prescribed by a doctor. The percentage of people using prescribed medication increased steadily between 1984 and 1995, but since then it seems to have stabilised.

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In 1998 43% of women in the fertile age group(16 to 49 years) used the contraceptive pill. Pill use has also stabilised in recent years, following an increase from 27% to 45% between 1981 and 1994.

***More visits to dentists***

In 1998 nearly 12 million people visited their dentist at least once, making a total of 28.5 million dental appointments. More women (79%) go to the dentists than men (76%), although both percentages have risen since 1981.

***GP and specialist consultations remain stable***

Last year just over 11.5 million people visited their family doctor at least once and nearly 6 million consulted a specialist. Again there are difference between men and women. In 1998 more women than men visited their general practitioner: 81% and 70% respectively. For specialist visits the differences are smaller: 41% of women and 35% of men. The number of visits to GPs and specialists have been fairly stable since 1995.

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