

HEALTH NOTES

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JUNE:

MEN'S HEALTH MONTH

www.menshealthnetwork.org

Face it, guys... you don't take very good care of yourselves! Far too many of you don't see a doctor unless there's something seriously wrong, or your partner makes you go (probably made the appointment for you, too...) Men are half as likely to visit a doctor for a checkup as women are, and there are over 7 million American men who haven't seen a doctor in over 10 years...

Being tough may have some advantages, but it can also kill you – most life-threatening illnesses, including cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, can be treated or cured if they're caught early. However, one recent study found that two-thirds of men won't even go to the doctor when they were experiencing chest pain or shortness of breath – two early warning signs of a heart attack.

Excluding pregnancy-related office visits, women make twice as many preventative care visits as men. (Centers for Disease Control)

THE PROBLEM

In 1920, women outlived men by an average of one year. Today, that difference is more than five years. Why? – it's because men...

- Die younger – and in great numbers – of heart disease, strokes, cancer, diabetes and many other treatable diseases
- Don't take care of themselves as well as women do
- Don't seek medical attention when they need it
- Are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors
- Are less likely than women to adopt preventive health measures
- Are less likely to have health insurance
- Are more likely to work in dangerous occupations

"The time to see your doctor isn't when you're hooked up to life support! – it's now, when you're feeling healthy!"

SYMPTOMS

When a warning light flashes on the car's dashboard, most men take the car to the shop (some know how to fix it themselves...) but when warning lights flash on their bodies, they don't (or won't) take notice. Here are a few "flashing lights" you should discuss with a doctor:

- **Changes in bowel or bladder habits:** can indicate prostate or bladder problems; blood in the urine is a common indicator of kidney problems; getting up two or more times a night to use the bathroom is NOT normal... don't ignore it!
- **Impotence or erectile dysfunction ("ED"):** most of the time, ED is caused by an underlying health problem, such as diabetes, clogged arteries, or high blood pressure... may be much more serious than "Not tonight, honey...I've got a headache"
- **Persistent backaches, changes in the color of urine or stool,** obvious changes in warts or moles, unusual lumps, recurrent chest pains or headaches, bleeding that won't stop, nagging cough, unexplained weight

loss, extreme fatigue... all can be signs of serious health problems

- **Depression:** although women may be more likely to attempt suicide, men are four times more likely to succeed. Because men are reluctant to ask for help and may try to hide depression, others may recognize the symptoms before he does...e.g., acting overly anxious, having trouble sleeping, complaining of feeling sad or "empty" or helpless, engaging in unusually risky or reckless behavior, or losing interest in hobbies or other pleasurable activities (including sex).

WHAT TO DO?

- **Know when to call the professionals:** get annual checkups; know your family history; be honest with your healthcare provider (even about habits like smoking, drinking, drug use, diet, exercise, etc.)
- **Check it out:** "self-exams" can be done by ...well, your self, of course, but have your spouse help you... no reason that you men can't help her with her monthly breast exams, and she can help you with your testicu-lar exams... it doubles the chances that the exams get done regularly and thoroughly, *and* doubles the chances that early symptoms won't go unnoticed



- **"An ounce of prevention"...** because habits are hard to break, make yours good habits: exercise, eat a high-fiber, low-fat diet, quit smoking, do monthly self-exams for lumps/bumps, skin cancers, etc., schedule an annual checkup with your doctor. If you don't have a family physician/can't afford one, look for health fairs, free or low-cost clinics and free screening events in your area; ask your employer, fraternal organization or place of worship to establish a yearly health fair; for a list of free or low-cost clinics, check out www.healthclinicsonline.com

HEALTHY CHOICES

Here are a few steps you can take to improve the quality – and quantity – of your life...

- Eat a healthy diet (fruits, veggies, whole grains, limiting cholesterol and saturated fats)
- Exercise for 30 minutes, five days a week
- Protect yourself from the sun
- Drink plenty of water: 8 glasses a day (no kidding)
- Limit alcohol to two drinks per day
- Don't smoke (and avoid second-hand smoke, too)
- See your doctor regularly
- Practice safe sex
- Wear a seatbelt in the car, helmet on bike or cycle
- Manage your stress: practice deep breathing and meditation (yoga and T'ai Chi are NOT for sissies!)
- Find joy in life: laugh (loud and hard) each day
- Get help if you need it

A great resource on men's health – *"Blueprint for Men's Health"* can be downloaded free of charge (English and Spanish) at www.menshealthnetwork.org/blueprint

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