

PROACTIVE CARE FOR MEN'S HEALTH

Contributed by Mandy Enright, MS, RDN, RYT

Just like you take your car for regular oil changes and tune-ups, our bodies require an equal amount of attention. Preventive care is more important than many realize. Waiting until symptoms are too severe tends to have a more serious impact on our health. Remember – it's easier to fix a leak than a flood. Establishing healthy habits and making routine doctors' appointments is essential for maintaining general health and wellness for men. Some key lifestyle factors include maintaining a healthy weight, eating nutritious foods, regular physical activity, quitting smoking, limiting alcohol consumption, managing stress levels, and protecting your skin from the sun. In honor of Men's Health Month, here are some ways men can be more proactive with their health.

Why Men Might be Resistant to Preventive Care

Research shows that men may be resistant to going to the doctor for the following reasons:

- Many men feel they're "naturally healthier than most people."
- Fear of bad news. Some men may wait until symptoms are too severe, therefore reinforcing the idea that they should fear the doctor's office.
- Health isn't something often discussed among men.
- Young men aren't conditioned to make regular doctors' visits like women.
- Men with more traditional beliefs about masculinity are less likely to use preventive care or medical treatment for injuries and infections. They tie this resistance to bravery and self-sufficiency.

Key Preventive Care Steps for Men's Health

Make a habit to book these key doctor appointments each year:

- See your primary care physician once a year for a routine check-up. This involves staying up to date on vaccinations and screenings as to avoid potential health consequences. Examples include flu vaccines, routine lab work to review cholesterol and blood glucose levels, cancer screenings, and measuring blood pressure.
- Schedule an eye exam every year. This allows the doctor to monitor your vision and eye health, along with detecting signs of conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.
- Schedule dental exams twice a year to find signs of tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral health problems early when they are easier to treat.

Critical Health Risks Among Men

Heart Disease

The CDC reported that 25% of male deaths are related to heart disease- and about half of those men didn't show any symptoms before it became fatal. Knowing your numbers like blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides and treating them if they are high can lower the risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. Routine visits to your primary care physician can help regulate any potential cardiovascular factors before it's too late.

Cancer

About one in eight men will have a prostate cancer diagnosis at some point, according to the American Cancer Society. Prostate cancer is the second highest cause of male cancer death. Routine screenings could save a life.





After age 50, men are more likely than women to develop melanoma and have a greater risk for developing other skin cancers as well. Protect your skin by wearing a sunblock with an SPF of 30 or higher, and by wearing hats or sunglasses. Schedule annual skin checkups with a dermatologist to understand your own risks and help catch any changes early.

Men are also more at risk for lung and colon cancer. Lung cancer is the most deadly cancer among men, with smoking being the primary culprit, so make a goal to quit smoking. Colon cancer occurs in one in 23 men. Discuss with your doctor what types of cancer screenings you may need, what age(s) you should start getting screened, and how often.

Mental Health

Another aspect of men's health that often gets overlooked is mental health. Men are often more hesitant to discuss mental health concerns with others. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates at least 6 million men suffer from depressive disorders. Treatment can include talking with others, seeing a mental health professional, or finding stress-relieving activities.

Other Prevalent Men's Health Conditions

Some other health conditions prevalent in men that can be treatable if caught earlier include diabetes, liver disease, and COPD. Not only is it important to receive regular screenings, but knowing and discussing your family and personal health history with a healthcare provider can also help you understand your own personal risk for disease and how you can minimize those risks.

Overcoming the Stigma

So how can we encourage more men to be proactive with their health? Here are some ideas to help break that mindset:

- Find a doctor you feel comfortable with and that you can trust.
- Telehealth appointments are an option for more convenience.
- Bring a loved one with you to appointments.
- The more often you go, the easier it becomes.

Most health insurance plans cover preventive health care appointments (screenings, shots, and visits), making it more feasible to add these to your current routine. Proactive health is the key to living a long and healthy life. Find what works for your life and start putting your health first!

Have you scheduled your annual 2023 physical yet? Consider this your reminder to pick up the phone and call today to get your physical on the books!



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