

Counselor

Men face a unique set of health challenges, particularly as they get older. Moreover, because men are often not as health-conscious as women, they have to make an extra effort to stay healthy. Eating well, exercising, and going to the doctor for regular check-ups can go a long way towards reducing the risk of developing major health issues.



Men's Health

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Factors Affecting Men's Health

It's a well-known medical fact that women outlive men by five to six years. One theory is that women live longer because they develop healthier habits than men—for example smoking and drinking less, and choosing more nutritional foods. Another theory is that men are employed in greater numbers in dangerous occupations such as mining, firefighting and construction, making them more vulnerable to disabling injuries.

Then there's the tendency of men to have a more lackadaisical attitude towards their health. According to one study, men are 24 percent less likely than women to have visited their doctor in the past year. They are also about 30 percent more likely than women to be hospitalized for preventable conditions such as congestive heart failure and diabetes.

Get Regular Check-ups

The conclusion? Men need to take a cue from women and become more proactive about their health. Along with eating well, and being physically active, regular check-ups with a doctor can improve health and reduce the chances of premature death and disability. Knowing family history is important too, especially with high-risk conditions such as heart disease and cancer.

The following are some of the medical tests every man needs:

1. Cholesterol Screening/Lipid Profile

This is a blood test for cholesterol, a type of fatty protein that can build up in your arteries putting you at risk for heart disease. Most experts recommend starting tests at age 20 and then repeating every five years. If your levels are high, your doctor will recommend retesting every six months to one year.

2. Blood Pressure Check

This very simple test, which uses an arm cuff to check blood pressure, is recommended for people of all ages. If your readings are normal, you'll only need to be tested once a year. Otherwise your doctor will recommend retesting every six months if your readings are high.

3. Diabetes Screening

This test checks to see how readily your body digests sugar. You should start at age 45 - however if you're significantly overweight, have high blood pressure or other risk factors such as a family history of the disease, you should get tested sooner.

4. Colonoscopy

This is a test for colorectal cancer which is the third leading cause of death in men. Fortunately, it is curable in 90 percent of cases—as long as it is caught in the early stages. Those with no risk factors should start getting a colonoscopy at age 50, and then repeat it every ten years.

5. Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)

This test uses a stool sample to test for the presence of blood which can indicate intestinal conditions such as Crohn's Disease, ulcerative colitis, or colorectal cancer. Start testing at age 50.

Weight, Diet and Nutrition

A healthy, balanced diet is essential for both genders, to lower the risk of obesity, diabetes, certain cancers and heart disease. That said, there are differences between genders when it comes to nutritional needs.

Caloric requirement is one. Men are generally larger and have more muscle mass than women, therefore caloric needs are greater. On average, a moderately active 125-pound woman needs 2,000 calories a day, while a 175-pound man with a similar exercise pattern needs 2,800 calories a day. Like women, men need to burn more calories than they take in if they want to lose weight.

Men may also need more protein than women—especially if they are physically active or want to build muscle mass. Protein is digested slowly in the body, which can help you feel full longer. Some experts suggest that men eat the majority of their protein at dinner because it helps rebuild muscle tissue overnight. Don't overdo it, though—excess protein can cause kidney stones, a particular concern for men.

If you need to lose weight, try to eat more fibre-rich foods such as bran cereal, brown rice, whole grain breads, kidney beans and apples. These tend to be filling and can satisfy hunger with less calories. Fibre-rich carbohydrates are also absorbed more slowly into your body, so they raise blood sugar gradually and don't trigger insulin spikes that boost cravings for sugary snacks. However, if you are extremely overweight, don't start any diet or exercise program without talking to your doctor first.

Prostate

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland just below the bladder that produces part of the fluid that carries sperm. As men age, it becomes enlarged and may cause a condition called Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) which makes you urinate more often or strain to empty your bladder. Men have more than a 50 percent chance of developing BPH in their lifetime. Although the vast majority of cases are annoying rather than serious, you should visit your doctor to check for cancer if you develop symptoms.

Prostate cancer is diagnosed with the Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) test. An elevated PSA level may be an indication that cancer is present. However, it is a relatively slow-growing cancer and is curable if caught early. About seven out of ten men diagnosed with prostate cancer will not die from the disease. Surgery, radiation therapy, and watchful waiting are all common treatments.

Important:

Men who have prostate cancer should not undergo testosterone replacement therapy. All men considering testosterone replacement therapy should go through a thorough prostate cancer screening prior to starting this therapy, including a rectal exam and PSA test. Ask your FHCP pharmacist about the pros and cons of hormone therapy.



Men's Health

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is essential for building cells. There are two types, bad and good. The bad, artery-clogging form is called low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and puts men at an increased risk for heart attacks, strokes and peripheral artery disease. The good form, called high-density lipoprotein (HDL), is actually beneficial and helps remove LDL from your blood and body. The ideal for good health is to keep the bad LDL levels down and the good HDL levels up.



The only way to know how high your cholesterol levels are is to get a blood test. The risk for high cholesterol starts in the 20's for many men and increases with age, so doctors recommend everyone over age 20 to get a cholesterol test at least once a year.

What should you do if your numbers are too high? In most cases, adopting a healthier lifestyle such as cutting back on fried and processed foods and walking 30 minutes a day can bring your numbers down to normal. If lifestyle changes are not enough, a variety of cholesterol-lowering medications are available. Your FHCP pharmacist can counsel you about side effects and interactions with other medications.

Sexual Health

There are many reasons why men experience sexual problems. For some, sex drive (libido) declines with age. Then of course, there is the dreaded erectile dysfunction (ED), defined as the inability to achieve and maintain an erection long enough to have satisfactory sexual intercourse. Although it is most common in men over 75, men of any age can develop erectile problems. Stress, anxiety, smoking, drinking alcohol and medication side effects can all cause ED.

Although ED itself isn't harmful to your health, it can often be one of the earliest warning signs of an underlying serious health condition, such as diabetes. In fact, between 35 and 50 percent of men with diabetes experience ED. That's why it's essential to see your doctor for a thorough medical examination if you have ED. Not only can it help you identify the cause of the problem, it may also alert you to a bigger health concern that needs immediate attention.

Fortunately, there are many treatments that can help you return to a more active sex life. These can include medications such as sildenafil (Viagra), or testosterone replacement therapy.

Understandably, many men find it difficult to talk about sexual dysfunction. Don't be one of them. Reach out to your FHCP pharmacist about any questions or concerns. They can play an important role in ensuring you have reasonable expectations for therapy, such as when you can see the initial benefits of your medication, and how much of an improvement you can expect. As well, they can inform you about potential side effects and drug interactions.

Alcohol Consumption/ Liver Disease

Science is raising a glass to the benefits of alcohol. Studies show that it may protect healthy adults from developing coronary heart disease—but only in moderate amounts. Heavy drinking over a long period of time can take a serious toll on your body, and has been associated with everything from cancers, heart disease to liver damage.

Liver damage is particularly insidious because people generally don't know they have a problem until it becomes serious. Alcohol affects the way your liver processes fat, so that you develop what is known as fatty liver, which is the first stage of liver disease. Liver alcoholic disease accounts for well over a third of liver disease deaths.

The good news is that your liver will start shedding its excess fat in two weeks if you stop drinking and stay within safe drinking guidelines

How can you tell if you're developing a problem? If people close to you have hinted that they're concerned about you, it's time to cut back. As well, if you make drinking a priority in your daily life, you're probably in the trouble zone.

The first step is to take a good, honest look at your drinking habits, and write down how much you drink and when. From there, set some drinking limits for yourself and make yourself accountable by sharing these self-imposed limits with other people.

Some alcohol problems are deep rooted in psychological issues. If stressful situations are making you drink more, you may want to see a professional to deal with it.



Alcohol Consumption Limits for Men

Men should consume no more than two drinks a day to maintain heart health. This can include a 12-oz wine cooler, a 5-oz glass of wine, a 12-oz beer, or a 1½-oz cocktail, 80 proof.

Q & A

Ask Your Helpful FHCP Pharmacist

Q. I've heard that eating grapefruit can be risky with some medications. Is this true?

Yes. There are now more than 85 drugs that may interact with grapefruit. These include some statins that lower cholesterol and certain antibiotic, cancer and heart drugs. The problem happens because grapefruit contains chemical substances that block an enzyme that breaks down certain medications in the body. Medication levels can become toxic in the body if left unchecked. In extreme cases, it can cause life-threatening muscle damage. What to do? Be careful if you consume grapefruit juice and are taking multiple medications. Double-check with your doctor or FHCP pharmacist to see if you need to limit or reduce your consumption of grapefruit juice and products.

Q. Is it safe to take an aspirin once a day?

It depends. Although taking a low-dose daily aspirin has been shown to ward off heart disease, it's not indicated for everyone. Studies show that daily consumption of aspirin can cause serious stomach bleeding. You'll have to outweigh the potential benefits against the risk. Generally, experts don't recommend taking a daily aspirin if you haven't had a heart attack or any risk factors for the disease. Be sure to consult with your medical practitioner.

Q. What herbal remedies are helpful for an enlarged prostate?

Saw palmetto extract is one of the most widespread herbal remedies used to reduce the size—and irritating symptoms— of an enlarged prostate. While studies show that saw palmetto is well-tolerated by most men, talk to your doctor or FHCP pharmacist to make sure it won't interfere with any other medications you may be taking.



A Healthy Position

Supplements Men Need

Boron

This trace mineral has been shown to reduce your risk of developing prostate cancer. As well as fighting cancer, it can improve memory and concentration. Aim for 3 milligrams (mg) a day.

Omega-3s

These fatty acids can help reduce the risk of clots and blocked arteries. Studies show that men with the highest omega-3 levels have the lowest risk of dying of heart disease. How much? For healthy men, 1,000 mg a day. Those with health problems may need 2,000 to 4,000 mg.

Selenium

Studies have linked this mineral to a decreased risk of cancers of the prostate, colon and lungs. Experts recommend 200 micrograms (mcg) a day—more when you're sick.

Folic Acid

This essential B vitamin improves blood flow to the brain, which can help with dementia and memory loss. Aim for 500 mcg a day.

Vitamin E

This potent antioxidant can help reduce the risk of certain eye diseases, heart disease, cancer, and even Alzheimer's disease. Aim for up to 400 international units (IU) a day.

Note: As with any remedy, do not exceed the dosage recommendation on the package. If you're taking other medications, ask your FHCP pharmacist about possible interactions with your supplements.

Take The Check-Up Challenge

Don't wait until a condition is serious before making a medical appointment. Focusing on preventative health can help you avoid, or at least minimize the effects of serious illnesses, and help you live a longer, healthier life.

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Next Month's Feature!

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Pain/Arthritis

Arthritis is a term to describe more than 100 rheumatic diseases and conditions that affect a joint or joints. Some sufferers will only experience mild aching or stiffness, while others will experience debilitating symptoms that can affect their daily activities, social life and work. Indeed, arthritis is among the leading causes of disability in Canada, but fortunately there is a lot you can do to minimize the damage.

In next month's feature, find out more about:

Symptoms of arthritis

Arthritis in the workplace

Managing chronic pain

Treatments and medication

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