

Men's Health: Just the Facts

June is Men's Health Month, the perfect time for men in North Texas and around the rest of the nation to reflect on their own health and wellness and make any changes needed to live a healthier, longer life.

It is a fact that the average life expectancy for men is shorter than it is for women. A leading reason for the "longevity gap" is that men don't take care of themselves as well as women do and often let their health fall by the wayside. As long as they feel healthy and productive, many men don't see their doctor regularly, have all of their needed screenings or consider the risks behind serious health issues.

Regardless of past habits, it's never too late to make positive, healthy changes. **Here are ten things men can do to take control of their own health:**

1. Get an annual physical. Even if you feel perfectly healthy, you should see your provider at least once a year for a checkup. When there, speak openly about any concerns you have, both physical and mental. Just like maintenance on a car, your body needs regular check-ups, too.
2. Get your screenings and shots on time. Make sure you're getting regular screenings for prostate and colon cancer and that you are getting a flu shot, pneumonia vaccination, a shingles vaccine and a combination tetanus/diphtheria booster shot as directed by your doctor.
3. Call or see your doctor when you're feeling sick or have

an injury. Prompt medical care can make a big difference. Don't wait and think you can "tough it out."

4. Maintain a healthy diet by eating healthy foods filled with the nutrients you need as you age.
5. Stay physically active. Regular exercise tones up your heart, circulation, and muscles, strengthens bones, boosts brain function, lifts your mood, and can help prevent and ease depression.
6. Keep your brain active and challenge your brain by trying new things. Do word puzzles, join a book club or sign up for a class at the local library, senior center, or community college.
7. Don't smoke. If you do, tell your Care N' Care healthcare provider and they can help you stop.
8. Drink only in moderation. Check with your Care N' Care doctor to make sure that drinking alcohol—in light to moderate amounts—is alright for you. If you have a health issue or take certain medications, you may need to drink less or not at all.
9. Avoid too much sun as aging skin is more susceptible to sun damage, which increases risks of skin cancer. Use sunscreen year-round and, for added protection wear a wide-brimmed hat.
10. See your dentist at least once a year for cleanings and check-ups. If you wear dentures, they should be checked to make sure they still fit properly. Your dentist should also check for signs of diseases of the mouth.





Bladder Health

While many health issues are often discussed among family and close friends, one topic that is rarely mentioned is bladder health. The fact remains that with aging the risk of bladder-related problems increases as both the bladder and the urethra undergo natural changes. For men over 60, the most common bladder-related medical problems include bladder or urinary tract infections, urinary incontinence, overactive bladder and changes in the prostate which can become enlarged and block the flow of urine.

While you can't control everything that affects bladder health, the National Institute on Aging provides 13 tips to help keep your bladder healthy:

1. Drink six to eight, 8-ounce glasses of fluid each day. Water is best for bladder health.
2. Limit alcohol and caffeine.
3. Quit smoking.
4. Eat plenty of high-fiber foods (whole grains, vegetables, fruits) to help prevent constipation.
5. Keep a healthy weight.
6. Exercise regularly.
7. Do pelvic floor muscle exercises to help hold urine in the bladder.
8. Try to urinate at least every three to four hours and use the bathroom whenever needed.
9. Take enough time to fully empty the bladder when urinating.
10. Be in a relaxed position while urinating; relaxing the muscles around the bladder will make it easier to empty the bladder.
11. Wipe from front to back after using the toilet, especially after a bowel movement.
12. Urinate after sex.
13. Wear cotton underwear and loose-fitting clothes. That allows air to keep the area around the urethra dry and minimizes that chance that bacteria can grow.

“Bladder-related issues in men are more common than many people realize,” says Dr. Fish. “Uncontrollable urination or urinary incontinence occurs in eleven to 34 percent of older men while, at the same time, one in three men over 50 years of age and nearly all men aged over 85 years experience some difficulty in urinating.

“These problems can be annoying but generally, if they are mild, they will not affect your health and may be improved by following the simple self care measures,” Dr. Fish continues. “The best thing to do is to talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your symptoms. They will be able to assess whether self-care, medication, surgery or further testing is right for you.”



Reduce Your Colon Cancer Risk

We hear about prostate cancer awareness for men and breast cancer awareness for women, but there's one cancer that both genders have an equal risk of developing: colon cancer.

Colorectal cancer surpasses both breast and prostate cancer as the second-leading type of cancer in the United States. However, it's a largely preventable disease with early screening and detection.

Ways to reduce your risk of colon cancer include:

- Get a regular colon cancer screening starting at age 50 if you're at a normal risk. For those at high risk due to personal or family history, your doctor may recommend screenings before age 50.
- Consume between 25 and 30 grams of fiber each day from fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans and whole-grain breads. Eat a low-fat diet and maintain a healthy weight.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation (if you drink) and do not smoke.
- Aim for at least 20 minutes of exercise a day three to four times a week.
- Tell your doctor if you experience symptoms such as blood in your stool, a change in bowel habits, unplanned weight loss, stools that are narrower than usual, abdominal pains or other gastrointestinal problems.

Cardiovascular Disease

About one out of every three adult males have some form of cardiovascular disease. **Contributing factors include:**

- Smoking
- Lack of physical activity
- High cholesterol or high blood pressure
- Excess weight
- Poor diet
- Excessive alcohol use
- Excessive stress

As men begin dealing with age-related health issues, they must watch these risk factors closely and make the necessary adjustments to their habits and lifestyle in order to minimize risk and stay healthy.

Prostate Cancer

Other than skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in American men. The American Cancer Society estimates that about one in nine men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime.

While prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death (behind lung cancer) in American men, most men diagnosed with prostate cancer do not die from it. In fact, more than 2.9 million men in the U.S. who were diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point are still alive today. That is why all men, regardless of age, should take steps daily to support, protect and maintain prostate health.

For seniors this is a particularly telling issue because the size of the prostate slowly grows larger as men get older, increasing the likelihood of having prostate problems. If the prostate gets too large, it can be very serious and life-threatening.

Often, older men notice symptoms themselves, and sometimes their doctor finds something during a routine check-up. **Among the signs of a prostate problem are:**

- Frequent urge to urinate.
- Blood in urine or semen.
- Painful or burning urination.
- Difficulty in urinating or dribbling of urine.
- Painful ejaculation.
- Frequent pain or stiffness in lower back, hips or upper thighs.

Lung Cancer

Every year, more people die of lung cancer than of three other major cancers combined. Lung cancer mainly occurs in the elderly; the average age at the time of diagnosis is about 70. Lung cancer is known to spread quickly and is usually rather far along before it is diagnosed, which is why it's so deadly. Tobacco smoke is the cause of 90 percent of all lung cancers—and the single most preventable cause of death overall. Quitting smoking at any age reduces your risk for lung cancer. Talk with your doctor about tools for smoking cessation.

Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes begins slowly, without obvious symptoms, as blood sugar levels slowly climb to dangerous levels. Increased thirst and a need to urinate more frequently is what usually brings men to see a doctor, and that's when diabetes

is detected. With diabetes, excessive amounts of glucose negatively impact practically everything in your body. Many health conditions among men are all complicated by diabetes. In order to prevent diabetes, men should get regular exercise, maintain a healthy diet, and lose excess weight. Regular blood sugar checks can detect rising glucose levels early, before other serious men's health issues occur.

Depression and Suicide

Depression is among the most serious of men's health issues but is often misunderstood because many men find it difficult to share how they feel and ask for help. With depression, hormones and stress multiply the negative effects. Appetite, sleep, and energy are all affected and this combines to produce feelings of hopelessness, fear and even anger. Women were previously thought to experience depression more than men, but this was probably due to men's reluctance to seek help. They often seek to cope in other ways, and many times these are unhealthy, like drinking. The tragic results can even be suicide which is the 8th leading cause of death among men (and not just the young). If you think you may be depressed, reach out to your Care N' Care doctor. Help is available.

A wealth of information on these and other health-related topics, along with valuable health resource guides, are provided free by Care N' Care and are available at <https://www.cnchealthplan.com/members/explore-healthy-resources/>

Experts agree that by taking better care of themselves, men can increase their odds of living healthier, longer lives. Men's Health Month is a perfect time to get started.

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