Florida Blue

BetterYou

Healthy Words of Wisdom

Men's Health

Men and women have many of the same health problems; however, some diseases or conditions are more common in men and some are unique to men. Health issues of particular concern for men include heart disease, stroke, prostate disease, testicular disease, sexually transmitted diseases and erectile dysfunction. Knowing the risk factors for these health concerns and working on the controllable risk factors are positive steps men can take to improve their quality of life. Early death from some diseases can be prevented. You can take responsibility for your own health by learning and practicing these simple skills:

- Make positive lifestyle changes
- Get regular check-ups with your doctor
- Adhere to preventive screening recommendations
- Practice self-examination

Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for men in the U.S. It is important to learn about your cardiovascular system to help prevent disease. Often, making lifestyle changes is all that's needed.

Quit smoking. Smoking is the most preventable risk factor for heart disease. A person's risk of heart disease and heart attack greatly increases with the number of cigarettes he or she smokes. Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke also have an increased risk. If you smoke, quit. Better yet, never start smoking at all.

Improve cholesterol levels. The risk for heart disease increases when your total cholesterol to "good" HDL ratio is greater than 5:1. Optimal levels of cholesterol are as follows: total cholesterol - less than 200 mg/dL; HDL (good cholesterol) - greater than 60 mg/dL; and LDL (bad cholesterol) - less than 100 mg/dL.

Control high blood pressure. Many millions of Americans have hypertension, or high blood pressure. This is the most common heart disease risk factor. A heart healthy blood pressure is less than 120/80. You can positively affect blood pressure through diet, exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and if necessary, prescription medications.

Get active. Gradually increase your physical activity level so you are getting 150 minutes of moderate activity OR 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week, spread out over at least three days.

Control diabetes. If not properly controlled, diabetes can lead to significant heart damage, including heart attacks and death. Control diabetes through a healthy diet, exercise, maintaining a healthy weight and taking medications as prescribed by your doctor.

Eat right. Eat a heart-healthy diet low in sodium, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and refined sugars. Try to increase your intake of foods rich in vitamins and other nutrients, especially antioxidants, which have been proven to lower your risk for heart disease. Eat plant-based foods such as fruits and vegetables, nuts and whole grains.

Achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Excess weight puts significant strain on your heart and worsens several other heart disease risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides. Research shows that obesity itself increases the risk for heart disease. By eating right and exercising, you can lose weight and reduce the risk.

Manage stress. Poorly controlled stress and anger can lead to a heart attack or stroke. Learn to manage stress by practicing relaxation techniques, managing your time more efficiently, setting realistic goals and trying new techniques such as guided imagery, massage, Tai Chi or yoga.

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How do I know if I'm having a heart attack?

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often, those affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before seeking help. Here are signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.

- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.

- **Shortness of breath** with or without chest discomfort.

- **Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

How do I know if I'm having a stroke?

The American Stroke Association has established the following warning signs:

- Sudden **numbness or weakness** of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.

- Sudden **confusion, trouble speaking** or understanding.

- Sudden **trouble seeing** in one or both eyes.

- Sudden **trouble walking, dizziness,** loss of balance or coordination.

- Sudden, **severe headache** with no known cause.

Learn the signs, but remember this: Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack or stroke, tell a doctor about your symptoms. If you or someone with you has one or more of these signs, don't delay! Immediately call 911 or the emergency medical services (EMS) number so an ambulance can be sent for you.

FACE DROOPING

ARM WEAKNESS

SPEECH DIFFICULTY

TIME TO CALL

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Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer, other than skin cancers, in American men. About 1 in 6 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime. Risk factors for prostate cancer include age (increases greatly after age 50), race (more common among African American men), nationality, family history and diet.
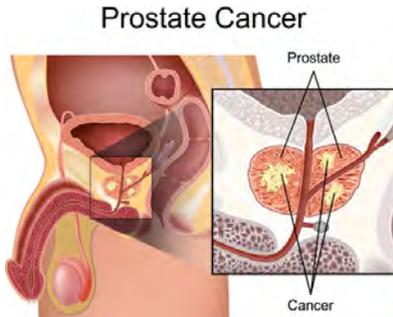
Prostate Cancer Signs and Symptoms Include:

- Trouble having or keeping an erection (impotence)
- Blood in the urine
- Pain in the spine, hips, ribs or other bones
- Weakness or numbness in the legs or feet
- Loss of bladder or bowel control

The American Cancer Society recommends that you speak with your health care provider for guidance on prostate cancer screening.

Testicular Cancer

Testicular cancer is cancer in one or both testicles. A man's lifetime chance of developing testicular cancer is about 1 in 300. Testicular cancer is one of the most curable forms of cancer.

The American Cancer Society recommends a testicular exam by a doctor as part of a routine cancer-related checkup. Many doctors advise their patients to practice self-examination every month. If you choose to examine your testicles, the best time to do so is after a bath or shower, when the skin of the scrotum is relaxed.

- Hold the penis out of the way and examine each testicle separately.
- Hold the testicle between your thumbs and fingers with both hands and roll it gently between the fingers.
- Look and feel for any hard lumps or nodules (smooth, rounded masses) or any change in the size, shape or consistency of the testes.

You should be aware that each normal testis has an epididymis, which can feel like a small bump on the upper or middle outer side of the testis. Also, a testicle can enlarge for many reasons other than cancer. If you choose to examine your testicles, you will become familiar with what is normal and what is not. Always report any changes to your doctor immediately.

Benign Prostate Hyperplasia (BPH)

Benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH) is known simply as enlarged prostate. BPH is a benign (noncancerous) enlargement of the prostate that blocks the flow of urine through the urethra. The prostate cells gradually multiply, creating an enlargement that puts pressure on the urethra, the tube through which urine and semen exit the body. Many men tolerate the problems caused by BPH for many years before they seek medical help.

Signs and Symptoms Include:

- A weak or slow urinary stream
- A feeling of incomplete bladder emptying
- Difficulty starting urination
- Frequent urination during the day and at night
- Urgency to urinate
- A urinary stream that starts and stops
- Straining to urinate

Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction, commonly referred to as ED, is the inability to achieve and sustain an erection suitable for sexual intercourse. This condition is not considered normal at any age and is different from other problems that interfere with sexual intercourse. A much more common problem that affects the majority of men at some point in their life is the occasional failure to achieve an erection, which can occur for a variety of reasons, such as drinking too much alcohol or being extremely tired. Failure to achieve an erection less than 20% of the time is not unusual and treatment is rarely needed. Failure to achieve an erection more than 50% of the time, however, generally indicates that there is a problem requiring treatment.

Common causes of ED include atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), nerve diseases, psychological factors (stress, depression and performance anxiety) and injury to the penis. Chronic illness, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, certain medications and a condition called Peyronie's disease (scar tissue in the penis) can also cause ED.

If you suspect you may have erectile dysfunction, see your doctor. He or she can perform a variety of tests to identify what is causing your problem and refer you to a specialist if needed. Once the cause is identified, there are several treatments to consider.

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Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are spread by sexual contact involving the genitals, mouth or rectum. STDs, which affect both men and women, are a worldwide public health concern. Most STDs can be cured, such as chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhea. STDs that cannot be cured include:

- HIV - which causes AIDS

- Genital Herpes

- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) - which can cause genital warts

STDs can be spread by people who don't know they are infected. Always use protection every time you have sex, including oral sex, until you are sure you and your partner are not infected with an STD. Genital herpes and HPV can be spread when symptoms are not present. Some STDs, such as HIV, can take up to 6 months before they can be detected in the blood. Even if you and your partner have been tested, use protection during sex until you both have not had sex with another person for 6 months. Then get tested again.

Most people get HIV by having unprotected sex with someone who has HIV. Another common way of getting the virus is by sharing needles with someone who is infected with HIV when injecting drugs. People who inject drugs or steroids, especially if they share needles, syringes, cookers or other equipment used to inject drugs, are at risk of being infected with HIV.

Practice Safe Sex

- **Watch for symptoms of STDs.** Symptoms may include pain while urinating, unusual discharge, sores, redness or growths in your or your partner's genital area.

- **Don't have more than one sex partner at a time.** The safest sex is with one partner who has sex only with you. Every time you add a new sex partner, you are exposing yourself to the diseases that their other partners may have. Your risk for an STD increases if you have several sex partners at the same time.

- **Use a condom** every time you have sex. A condom is the best way to protect yourself from STDs. Latex and polyurethane condoms do not let STD viruses pass through, so they offer good protection from STDs. Condoms made from sheep intestines do not protect against STDs.

- **Use a water-based lubricant** if there is a lack of lubrication during sexual intercourse. Lubricants help prevent tearing of the skin. Small tears in the vagina or rectum allow STDs to enter the bloodstream.

- **Be responsible.** Avoid sexual contact if you have symptoms of an infection or if you are being treated for an STD or HIV. If you or your partner has herpes, avoid sexual contact when a blister is present and use condoms at all other times.

- **Consider that not having sex** is the only sure way to prevent STDs.
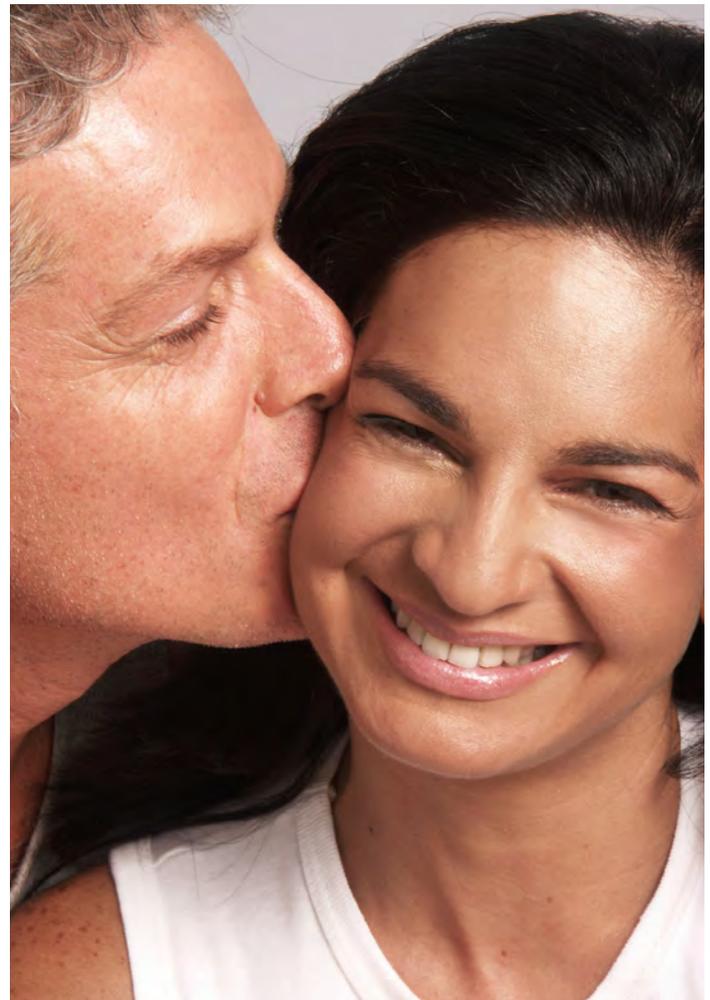
References: www.webmd.com; www.cancer.org; www.strokeassociation.org; www.americanheart.org

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