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Men's health

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This factsheet is for people who would like a general overview of health issues that affect men.

Men and women share many health problems, such as heart disease and high blood pressure. However, certain conditions, including prostate disorders, testicular problems and impotence are specific to men.

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Heart health

Coronary heart disease

Heart disease claims more men's lives than any other disease. If you have a family history of heart disease, you have a greater chance of developing it. Changing your lifestyle can reduce this risk significantly. You can do this by:

- stopping smoking, if you smoke
- maintaining a healthy weight
- exercising regularly
- controlling your blood pressure and stress levels
- eating a healthy, balanced diet
- drinking no more than the recommended amount of alcohol
- keeping to a low salt intake

These lifestyle changes may also reduce the risk of many other diseases such as lung cancer, bowel cancer and stroke.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) is a major risk factor for heart disease. If you have high blood pressure over a long period of time, you are more likely to suffer a heart attack, stroke or kidney failure. Your GP can monitor your blood pressure. If it's high on several separate occasions, your doctor may recommend medication to bring it back to normal.

Blood pressure is usually considered high if it measures more than 140/90.

If you are taking medication to control your blood pressure, it's a good idea to have it checked every six months.

Prostate health

Enlarged prostate

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The prostate is a gland which is located between your bladder and urethra (the tube for passing urine). Between one to three in every 10 men in their early 70s may have symptoms of an enlarged prostate. The symptoms of which include:

- feeling that you have not completely emptied your bladder after urinating
- frequently waking up in the night to urinate
- urinating often during the day
- weak urine stream

An enlarged prostate can lead to urine infections. On rare occasions the passing of urine can be completely blocked. In some men the symptoms of an enlarged prostate go away on their own, while others may require medication.

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is more common with increasing age and is usually found in men over 50. The causes are unclear but there is an increased risk if a close relative such as your father or brother have had it. Prostate cancer can press on the urethra and block the flow of urine. As a result you may have difficulty urinating, have to urinate more often, experience pain on passing urine or have blood in the urine. However, if you are having these symptoms there may be other causes which are not due to cancer.

Whether or not you have treatment depends on many factors including your age, general health, stage of the cancer and side-effects of the treatment. Prostate cancer is often slow growing, so in some older men the best treatment may be "watchful waiting" (no treatment). In other men, surgery, radiotherapy or hormone therapy may be considered.

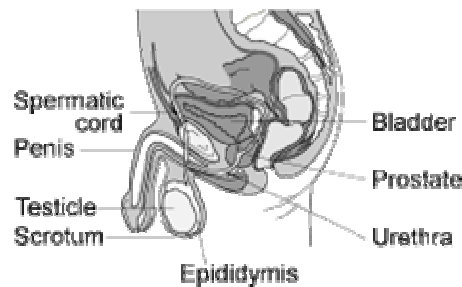


Illustration showing the organs of the male pelvis

Testicular problems

All men should examine their testes regularly for anything unusual. If you notice any changes such as swelling, lumps or pain in your testes you should get advice from a doctor.

Testicular cancer

Cancer of the testicle rarely causes pain, but may cause the scrotum to swell and requires prompt treatment. The most common symptoms are a painless lump and swelling due to the collection of fluid in the scrotum (hydrocoele). It's most common in men aged between 20 to 45.

Torsion of the testicle

Severe pain and swelling of the testicle occurs if the spermatic cord is twisted (this is called torsion). The pain develops quickly, and you may also feel sick and vomit. Unless testicular torsion is treated within a few hours, there may be permanent damage. Treatment is usually by surgery. Torsion of the testicle usually occurs in men aged 15 to 30.

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Impotence (erectile dysfunction)

Impotence is an on-going inability to achieve or to maintain an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse. The likelihood of being affected increases with age. Anything interfering with blood flow to the penis can lead to impotence. Disease, injury, medication, anxiety and depression are common causes.

Many men are reluctant to talk about impotence but in most men it can be treated. A range of treatment options are available including psychotherapy, prescription medicines and devices. Drugs like sildenafil (eg Viagra) are highly effective in treating some forms of impotence. However, they can have serious side-effects and should only be taken after consultation with your GP.

Sexually transmitted infections

Some of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are chlamydia, genital warts and genital herpes. Using barrier methods of contraception, such as condoms, can reduce the risk of getting many STIs.

Preventing disease - a healthy lifestyle

Eat well

A healthy diet doesn't mean you have to stop eating certain foods, it just means eating a wide variety of foods as part of a balanced diet. Ideally, this should include:

carbohydrates, such as bread, milk and rice - making up at least a third of your daily diet

protein, such as meat, fish and beans or lentils

fats, such as butter, which should be no more than a third of your daily diet

fruit and vegetables, at least five portions a day

less than six grams of salt per day

Be active

Activities such as brisk walking make your heart work harder and can improve your health. Exercising for 30 minutes a day, five times a week offers significant health benefits. Those 30 minutes don't have to be continuous. You can do them in two sessions of 15 minutes to fit them into your daily routine.

Manage stress

If you feel you can't cope you may be feeling stressed. This could be related to work or your lifestyle. Take steps to reduce the stress in your life and try to change the way you respond to it. Consider relaxation techniques (such as meditation or yoga), pace yourself by tackling one task at a time and set time aside to relax.

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