

HEALTHY AGING: A GUIDE FOR MEN

Men are often more likely to ignore their physical health and wellbeing than women. According to aging experts men frequently put off regular physical exams, forget to take their meds, fail to get vaccinations, exercise, or eat a healthy diet. Men are more likely to smoke or drink alcoholic beverages than women and frequently put off doctor's visits for as long as possible.

Women are usually much more informed and interested in health care than men -- especially if they are parents and are responsible for raising healthy children. According to the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University most women say they discuss physical activity, diet and exercise with their doctors. They subscribe to women's magazines that regularly feature articles on health, diet, exercise and wellness. Women often chat with friends about health-related concerns.

In contrast, many older men take a "tough-it-out" attitude toward health care and see a doctor only when they are very ill or very uncomfortable. This approach to health is especially risky for older men who are at increased risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, heart and kidney disorders, stroke, lung diseases, cancer and other diseases of later life.

The good news is that many of these diseases can be treated or prevented with a few basic lifestyle changes.

SCHEDULE REGULAR CHECKUPS AND SCREENINGS

Family caregivers can discuss the importance of regular medical exams with their older relative and encourage him to schedule an appointment with a doctor. Annual check-ups for men should include

For men 65 and older:

- Height and weight measurement
- Blood pressure check
- Skin exam
- Prostate, rectal and thyroid exam
- Stool sample for blood
- Dental exam
- Hearing and vision
- Blood sugar test for diabetes
- Cholesterol checks if your parent has diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure or if he smokes.

Every 3 years the exam should also include:

- Thyroid hormone test
- Complete blood count including cholesterol and blood sugar
- Hearing evaluation
- Complete vision evaluation including cataract and glaucoma exams
- Urine test for diabetes, kidney disease and other disorders

Every 3-5 years:

- Sigmoidoscopy for colon cancer

VACCINES PREVENT DISEASE

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that older men and women get these vaccinations:

- **FLU SHOTS.** The flu virus changes often so your relative (and you!) should get a flu shot every year between September and mid-November. Common side effects are soreness, swelling, headache or low fever. They usually disappear by the next day. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that all older adults should get a flu shot every year.
- **PNEUMOCOCCAL VACCINE.** Pneumococcal disease is a serious lung infection that can spread to other parts of the body. It is recommended for adults over 65 and can be given at along with a flu shot. Side effects are similar to those of flu shots.
- **TETANUS** is caused by bacteria that enter the body through a cut or puncture wound. Symptoms include stiffness in the jaw and neck, fever, and difficulty swallowing. Tetanus shots have few side effects – the most common is a sore arm. They should be given every ten years.
- **DIPHTHERIA** is a serious bacterial infection that may cause breathing and heart problems. The vaccine can be given at the same time as a tetanus shot or tetanus booster.
- **SHINGLES.** If your relative had chickenpox as a child he or she may be at risk for developing shingles in later life. After the chickenpox symptoms disappear, the virus that caused the disease stays in the body's nerve cells. Years later the virus may become active again and cause severe pain. Zostavax is a new vaccine that boosts the body's immunity to the herpes virus and lessens the pain of shingles. Ask your doctor for more information about this medication.

HEALTHY EATING

Use the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to plan healthy meals and personalized menus for your older parent. It's available online at www.mypyramid.gov. USDA recommends filling your older parent's plate – and the rest of the family's too with:

- whole grain breads, cereals, crackers, rice or pasta
- broccoli, spinach, and other green leafy vegetables, carrots, and sweet potatoes
- fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit
- Low-fat milk, yogurt and other dairy products
- Low-fat or lean meats and poultry or protein sources like fish, beans, peas, and nuts.
- Alcoholic drinks and sugary beverages should be used in moderation.

If your father needs to lose or gain weight or needs to restrict sugar or fat consumption suggest that he schedule an appointment with a registered dietitian. A dietitian can teach him to choose nutritious foods, develop weight loss or weight gain programs, count calories and carbohydrates and offer tips for making healthy food choices when eating out.

ACTIVE AGING

The benefits of physical activity are many. A good workout can help your older parent:

- Prevent heart disease and other age-related disorders
- Reduce high blood pressure
- Manage weight
- Increase strength and energy
- Sleep better, feel better

If your father hasn't had much physical activity recently suggest that he start a fitness program slowly and gradually increase his workouts to avoid injuries. Remind him that not all physical activities require weight lifting, shooting hoops, hitting baseballs or running around the high school track. Raking leaves, mowing the lawn or walking to the store instead of driving to buy a newspaper all count as exercise and if he keeps at it will increase his fitness level.

TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH SIR!

Learning how to care for a body that's no longer young is an important part of the aging process especially for older men. It may take time for a man to realize that his body is no longer 21 and needs much more care and attention than it did when he was younger. Family members can help older relatives become more knowledgeable about their changing bodies and health needs and learn how to accommodate the needs of their aging bodies. [1004/5/10