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### Men's Health: A To-Do List for Lowering Risks

Preventive health screenings should be a priority for all of us, but sadly, many men only see a doctor when they are extremely sick, and may skip preventive care all together. Men's Health Week, June 14-20, is a great time to give some thought to health and wellness and become a better informed patient.

Failing to get routine checkups and delaying care, even for potentially life-threatening conditions such as chest pain, shortness of breath or new skin lesions, can contribute to poor health and, in some cases, even result in premature death. According to a 2009 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) report, men from ages 18-44 years are 70 percent less likely to visit a doctor and were 80 percent less likely to have a primary source of health care, compared to women.

The CDC and National Institute of Health (NIH) attribute many ailments that affect men to unhealthy diets and poor lifestyle choices.

Healthy lifestyle habits include:

- making healthy food choices
- maintaining an ideal body weight
- exercising regularly
- practicing safe sex
- avoiding tobacco usage
- wearing a seatbelt
- limiting the consumption of alcohol and caffeine

Unintentional deaths in young men, which are often alcohol related, are most often due to accidents. Overall, however, leading causes of death in males are heart disease and cancer, accounting for more than 50 percent of all male deaths in the U.S., according to the CDC. Taking charge of your heart health and lowering the risks for cancer can be as simple as making healthier lifestyle choices. The CDC reports that during 2000-2004, smoking resulted in an estimated annual average of 269,655 deaths among males. If you are a smoker, quitting is the single greatest step you can take to be healthier and reduce your risk of premature serious illness and death. If you are ready to quit, talk to your primary care provider about how to make a quit plan. For additional tips on how to quit, please visit [www.tricare.mil/tobaccofree](http://www.tricare.mil/tobaccofree) or [www.ucanquit2.org](http://www.ucanquit2.org). Or to talk with a trained quit coach call the National Quit Line at 1-800-QUITNOW.

Preventive screenings can save lives. Below is a list of screenings all men should discuss with their primary care provider sooner rather than later:

- **Cholesterol:** High blood cholesterol is one of the major risk factors for heart disease. High blood cholesterol has no symptoms, leaving men unaware of raised cholesterol levels. Men should have their cholesterol checked regularly, starting at age 35. However, for those with risk factors including smoking, diabetes or heart disease that runs in the family, it's best to talk to your primary care provider about whether you should be tested sooner.
- **Blood pressure:** Blood pressure normally goes up and down throughout the day as we exercise and experience stress. But if your blood pressure is persistently high, it can increase the risk of health problems such as stroke, heart attack, heart and kidney failure. Many people do not know they have high blood pressure because usually there are no symptoms. The NIH suggests men get their blood pressure checked at least every two years. Your primary care provider can measure your blood pressure or you can check it yourself on a machine is available at many pharmacies.
- **Diabetes:** Diabetes significantly increases the risk of heart attacks. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends screening for type 2 diabetes in all adults with elevated blood pressure (either treated or untreated). HHS does not recommend a screening interval, however the experts associated with the American Diabetes Association recommend repeat testing at least every three years if tests results are normal or every one to two years if they are borderline normal.
- **Prostate cancer:** While it is not yet known exactly what causes prostate cancer, certain risk factors are linked to the disease. Age is the strongest risk factor. For unknown reasons, prostate cancer is also more common in African-American men than in men of other races. Sadly, neither of the screening tests – prostate-specific antigen or digital rectal exam – is perfect. It is not known for certain whether prostate cancer screening saves lives, according to the National Cancer Institute, yet many in the medical community recommend men make an informed

decision with their PCM on screenings.

- **HIV/AIDS:** Unprotected sex of any kind and taking injectable drugs, are the major risk factors for HIV. The CDC recommends HIV testing every year if you participate in any of these behaviors. Contact your PCM to discuss whether you should have a test or find a location for HIV testing near you. Common testing locations include local health departments, clinics, hospitals and other sites set up specifically to provide HIV testing.
- **Psychological health:** Psychological health goes hand in hand with physical health. Many men are reluctant to admit they have a psychological health problem or to seek help, and often suffer in silence. If you're suffering from depression or anxiety, are having problems with sleep, trouble with alcohol or other substance abuse, please see your primary care provider soonest and not run the risk that the situation may worsen. If you've had suicidal thoughts or thought of hurting others, you should seek help immediately. In the U.S. call 911 if you have an emergency or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. Veterans can call 1-800-273-8255 and press "1" to reach the Department of Veterans Affairs hotline. For less urgent problems additional information can be found on TRICARE's website [www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/MentalHealthAndBehavior](http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/MentalHealthAndBehavior).

The TRICARE Assistance Program (TRIAP), a Web-based video counseling service, brings behavioral health care closer to TRICARE beneficiaries. TRIAP is available in the U.S. to active duty service members, those eligible for the Transition Assistance Management Program and members enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select. It is also available to their spouses, no matter their age, and other eligible family members 18 years of age or older. TRIAP provides an avenue for private, non-reportable discussions of personal life issues, such as those related to family, relationships, work and stress on a one-to-one basis in the context of a confidential relationship with a licensed professional. For more information about TRIAP and other behavioral health resources, go to [www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth](http://www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth).

TRICARE Standard and Extra beneficiaries no longer pay cost shares for many preventive health services such as screenings for high cholesterol and blood pressure, diabetes, prostate cancer and HIV testing. Depending upon your race, age and any existing medical conditions, there may be other screening tests to talk to your doctor about. Your primary care provider can help you assess your individual health maintenance needs or advise you on the best way to monitor and treat any health conditions you may have.

While the life-expectancy gap between men and women continues to decrease, it's no secret that men still need to pay more attention to their bodies and take advantage of preventive services before something breaks down. As the saying goes "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!" Men's Health Week is a great time to start taking better care of yourself and taking advantage of your TRICARE benefit.

### Tips of the Month

Memorial Day weekend kicked off the 101-day-event known as summer. That's when swimming pools and amusement parks open their gates for families to have fun in the sun. With this fun also come important precautions to ensure everyone in your family has a safe season.

Summertime is usually packed with outdoor activities in sweltering summer weather. Extreme heat and the sun can cause several types of heat injuries or illnesses, and occasionally even death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) credits extreme heat conditions with about 400 deaths per year in the United States.

To protect your health during the summer, remember to keep cool and use good judgment. Heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat rashes are easy to treat at home, while a heat stroke requires professional medical attention.

When going out in the heat here are tips to help prevent heat illness or injury:

- Wear sunscreen. Be protected from the sun and sunburn by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Increase fluid intake, regardless of activity level and don't wait until the feeling of thirst occurs to drink. During heavy exercise in a hot environment, drink at least two glasses of cool fluids each hour.
- Replace salt and minerals. Heavy sweating removes necessary salt and minerals from the body. If you exercise drink plenty of fluids.
- Wear cool clothes. Wear as little clothing as possible when at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Stay cool. During extreme heat or humidity, stay indoors and, if possible, stay in an air-conditioned place. Go to a public place or building if you have no air conditioning—even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help the body stay cooler when you go back into the heat. If you must be outdoors try to limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours.