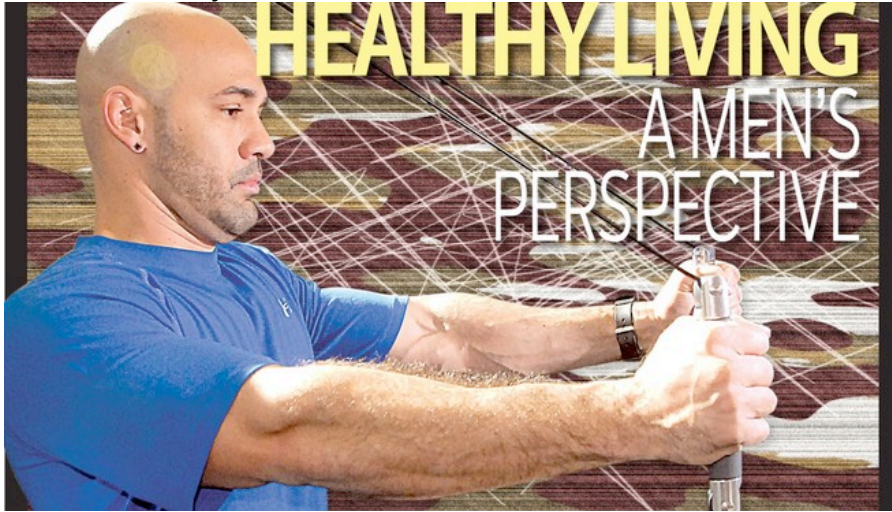


Healthy living: A men's perspective

Health experts urge males to get regular checkups

Hernando Today illustration



Men's Health Week is June 14-20.

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Even with the latest advancements in medical technology and treatments, statistics show men on average still live 5 to 6 years less than women do.

"The difference is even more profound for African-American men," according to the Florida Department of Health.

With Father's Day and Men's Health Awareness Week (June 14-20) approaching, health experts say there is no better time than today for men to focus on their health, not only for themselves but for their families.

Health experts say early detection screenings are vital in encouraging a healthier lifestyle for men in general.

According to the Florida Department of Health, Men's Health Month and National Men's Health Week are special campaigns that educate men and their families about the importance of positive health attitudes and preventive health care practices.

Research shows that males do not see a physician for a physical exam nearly as often as females. Males die at higher rates than women of the top causes of death. Men are considered more likely to be uninsured compared to women.

The Florida Department of Health recommends men have regular health screenings to prevent health problems. A screening can be done by a primary-care physician and should check things such as blood pressure, cholesterol, blood glucose, weight, vision, hearing, [skin and teeth](#) and gums.

Starting at age 50, men should be screened for colorectal and prostate cancer. African-American and Hispanic males, however, should begin having these tests at 45 because of higher risk factors.

Heart disease

"The leading cause of death for both men and women is heart attacks," said Dr. Thomas Mathews, [interventional cardiologist](#) with St. Luke Heart Institute and medical director of the [Percutaneous Coronary Intervention](#) Program at Brooksville Regional Hospital.

Blood pressure testing detects hypertension, better known as high blood pressure. On average men should have their blood pressure tested every two years. If you have a family history or medical condition that can cause high blood pressure, more frequent testing could be needed, Mathews said.

The average, or normal, results is a systolic pressure of 120 or less and a diastolic pressure of 80. A man with a systolic pressure in the 120-139 range and diastolic in the 80-89 range should have annual checks.

Left untreated, blood pressure higher than these ranges could lead to heart attack, heart failure, stroke and kidney damage, Mathews said.

"Heart disease is one of the few preventable diseases, if diagnosed early," he said, adding that the average death for men from heart attack or stroke are generally between the ages of 40 and 50.

The [American Heart Association](#) recommends cholesterol and triglyceride level testing to measure the LDL, or low-density lipoprotein, and HDL, or high density lipoprotein, levels in the blood. This test is generally done every five years for normal levels; more frequent testing, however, may be needed if levels are considered abnormal. High fat or [lipid levels](#) - especially LDL, known as "bad cholesterol" - indicate increased risk to heart attack and stroke.

"Routinely looking at cholesterol screenings detects if an individual is at risk," Mathews said. "The recommendation of a daily aspirin should be taken by the patient, if directed by a physician."

Diabetes

[Blood glucose](#) is a test to measure the "sugar" in the blood after fasting for an eight-hour period. The test determines whether the individual has type 2 diabetes.

In recent studies by the American Diabetes Association (ADA), type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. Millions of Americans have been diagnosed, and many more are thought to be at risk.

Type 2 diabetes is more common among African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, as well as the aged population. Test results determine how often the individual will need to repeat testing for [blood glucose](#) levels.

According to the American Diabetes Association, roughly 1.6 million cases of diabetes are diagnosed in people over the age of 20 each year and 12 million men over the age of 20 have been diagnosed with diabetes.

Statistics show diabetes is the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States. It is an underlying cause of death and diabetics have a two to four times higher risk of heart attack, and stroke than people with normal blood sugar levels, according to the ADA.

The ADA recommends regular body mass index evaluations. BMI is based on a person's height and weight. Overweight or obese men should work with their doctor to reach a healthy weight.

Eye care

Eye exams performed on a regular basis can detect "silent" conditions that could lead to blindness, such as glaucoma.

"Taking care of your vision and hearing are two senses that should not be taken for granted," said Dr. Keith B. Stolte, an ophthalmologist with the Stolte Eye and Hearing Center, in Spring Hill. "A simple eye exam can save your vision and a simple hearing test can detect any hearing loss."

Stolte said an eye exam with an eye doctor can sometimes detect early signs of serious health problems such as diabetes or hypertension, both of which can cause damage to the eye.

Early diagnosis can make all the difference in treating these conditions and preventing extensive damage to the eye, he added, saying glaucoma, macular degeneration and cataracts are often picked up during routine eye exams.

"Patients often come in complaining of a decline in their vision with the assumption they need a new prescription for glasses," Stolte said. "A large percentage of time their vision loss is due to an eye disease. Patients are often in denial. It's hard for most to accept their diagnosis."

Stolte suggests a baseline eye exam be done at age 40 to determine the need for glasses and to detect for eye disease. A hearing test should be done every 10 years, or when the concern of a hearing loss is present, he added.

"I have seen patients as young as 30 have been diagnosed with cataracts," Stolte said, "and with iPods, MP3s, loud music and machinery on the rise, we are seeing a lot of young people with hearing loss as well."

Erectile dysfunction drugs such as Viagra, Levitra and Cialis can be another cause of vision loss in men, according to Stolte.

"These medications can cause a stroke of the eye know as NAION, non-arthritis ischemic optic neuropathy," Stolte said. "The condition occurs when blood flow to the optic nerve is interrupted, injuring the nerve, and causes permanent vision loss. For these reasons it is highly recommended to see your eye doctor and hearing specialist."

Colon

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, colorectal cancer, in the colon or rectum, is one of three most common cancers and is also one of the top four cancers resulting in death among men.

"Colon and rectal cancers can occur when a growth or polyp on the lining of the colon or rectum has become malignant, or cancerous," said Dr. Syed Bin-Sagheer, a board-certified gastroenterologist at Advanced Gastroenterology and Pulmonary Care in Brooksville. "Colorectal cancer can be cured, especially when detected early."

According to research conducted by the Florida Department of Health, the death rate for colorectal cancer in Hernando County is about 16 percent, which is a decrease compared to four years ago, when the rate was 20 percent.

The procedure used by gastroenterologists to detect and test polyps is a colonoscopy, a medical procedure during which a long flexible tube is used to look inside the colon. The scope has a tiny video camera and a light on the end.

"Polyps are abnormal growths on the inside lining of the intestinal tract. They vary in size and shape and while most polyps are not cancerous, some may turn into cancer," said Bin-Sagheer.

Bin-Sagheer notes it is not possible to tell just by looking at a polyp if it is malignant or potentially malignant.

"Due to high risk factors, African-American and Hispanic men should be tested for colorectal cancer starting at age 45. For other males, testing should begin at age 50," said Bin-Sagheer. "Your physician will help you decide which test is right for you, as a family history of colorectal cancer may require earlier screenings."

Prostate

Research shows that about 30,000 men die in the U.S. each year from prostate cancer and is the second-leading cause of cancer death in men.

"Prostate screenings are usually started at the age of 50," said Dr. Omar Hamoui, urologist with Shoreline UroCare in Brooksville, "however, a baseline PSA is recommended at age 40, along with a digital rectal exam, or DRE, in men who have a family history of prostate cancer."

According to research from the Florida Department of Health, the death rate for prostate cancer in Hernando County is about 19 percent, which is an increase compared to four years ago, when the rate was 16 percent.

Hamoui describes the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, as a protein substance that is produced by the prostate gland.

Testing the level in the blood for men measures the protein and is an important marker of many prostate diseases.

"Coinciding with the PSA, a DRE is done to detect if the prostate is enlarged or suspicious for a cancerous condition," Hamoui said, noting a majority of men over the age of 50 do have an enlarged prostate that is the result of a noncancerous condition.

"A PSA less than 4 nanograms per milliliter is considered normal for men, however, normal level depends on a males race and age. A high PSA level may indicate prostate cancer or an enlarged prostate," Hamoui said.

"The most common forms of benign prostate conditions are inflammations of the prostate, prostatitis and enlargement of the prostate, commonly referred to as BPH," Hamoui said. BPH stands for benign prostatic hyperplasia.

"It's also important to note that a PSA level alone does not provide enough information to distinguish between benign and cancerous conditions, but will provide enough information should further testing be needed."

Research shows that about 82 percent of men over the age of 50 receive an annual PSA test. However, those surveyed for follow-up for a re-screening within a two-year period is about 62 percent of men over the age of 50.

For further information on the National Men's Health month and week observances, you can go to www.menshealthmonth.org.

<http://www2.hernandotoday.com/content/2010/jun/10/102013/hb-healthy-living-a-mens-perspective/health/>