

What manly men eat to stay manly

By Jennifer Sygo, National PostComments (1)

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Let's imagine, for a second, that you're a fiftysomething Canadian male. You might be at the top of your career, your kids are finally out of the house and you're starting to dig yourself out of the financial mess that the economic crisis brought. While your waistline is a bit thicker and your hair a little thinner than it was a decade ago, you like to believe that it lends a distinguished look that commands a certain respect.

Things might look good on the outside, however, your insides might tell a different story. Yes, cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar are all health issues you watch carefully at your annual physical, but what about those nagging issues that no one really likes to talk about? Really, who wants to chat about prostate health or erectile dysfunction? Even if you do have the guts to bring it up, can anything be done to prevent this stuff from happening?

Eating for a healthy prostate

If you're part of the cohort of ageing male boomers, then there is a good chance you were up last night to go to the bathroom — maybe several times. With ageing comes a gradual enlargement of the prostate gland, which can press on the urethra, ultimately restricting urine flow — or even blocking it entirely. This condition, known as benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH, is very common in older men, and while it may be relatively harmless for some, it can also be a precursor for prostate cancer, and therefore should be monitored carefully by your physician.

From a dietary perspective, there haven't been enough well-controlled studies on any nutrients or supplements to be able to draw definitive conclusions, but there is evidence that nutrients such as lycopene (a component released when tomatoes are cooked), the herbal supplement saw palmetto (at a dose of around 500 mg per day), ground flaxseed (two tablespoons per day), soy foods and a low-fat diet can all keep levels of prostate specific antigen (PSA) — a marker of prostatic growth under control. Less convincing is the evidence that taking vitamin E or selenium can prevent prostate cancer; in fact, the large SELECT study, examining the link between both supplements and the development of prostate cancer, was halted last year after it failed to produce any significant results.

### Diet and erectile dysfunction

We all know the story of the little blue pill. Once a source of much giggling and snickering, Viagra is now a monster drug for its maker, Pfizer, and has resulted in numerous spinoffs that all promise men a never-ending sexual youth. And while these medications are generally considered safe, the presence of erectile dysfunction, or ED, should not be taken lightly.

The path by which one develops ED actually has many of the same points of origin as heart disease, which has resulted in some researchers calling ED something of a harbinger of cardiovascular disease. In other words, if the plumbing isn't working down there, it could be a sign it's not working somewhere else, too.

Taking a pill to manage ED is one option, but the best bet is to also take a serious look at diet and lifestyle. Researchers in Italy have demonstrated that losing a bit of weight (about 10% of your initial weight, or about 20 lbs on a 200 lb man) and adopting a Mediterranean-type diet, can improve sexual function in about one-third of men with ED, without the use of medications. Need a refresher on the Mediterranean diet? Here are the key components:

- Choose fish or lean cuts of white meat, like chicken or turkey, more often. Consume red meats sparingly (preferably no more than once or twice per week), and when you do, choose lean cuts.
- Consume plenty of green vegetables and fruits, especially berries.

- Get healthy fats from nuts, olives, olive oil and avocados on a daily basis.
- Choose whole grains over white or refined grains.
- Dairy products are OK, especially yogourt. Eat cheese in moderation.
- And finally, don't forget the legumes, such as chick peas (think: hummus).

While eating this type of diet might be a big change for some, there is much to be gained from slow, steady progress. That might mean adding ground flaxseed to your cereal for prostate health, or choosing yogourt with nuts and berries for breakfast instead of a bagel with cream cheese. It turns out that eating this way can not only help keep your waistline stable and your heart healthy, it might also revitalize your love life, too. And that's good news for men and women alike.

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