



## MEN'S HEALTH

Research suggests that on average, men seek medical advice about 20% less than their female counterparts. When last did you have a health check?

### Heart health

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa, men are twice as likely to die from heart attacks as women. Your heart is your most essential organ. The left side receives oxygenated blood from the lungs and pumps it through the arteries to all parts of the body. The right side receives the deoxygenated blood back through your veins and sends it to the lungs to receive oxygen.

Plaque is a combination of fat, calcium, cholesterol and other materials found in the blood. A build-up in the arteries can lead to a narrowing and hardening of these blood vessels. When an artery becomes narrowed, blood flow is restricted. A loose piece of plaque may block smaller blood vessels and prevent the flow of blood and oxygen which may result in tissue damage and death.



### 7 healthy heart tips

1. Get active. Aim for 150 minutes of activity each week.
2. Eat a healthy diet. Your diet should include plenty of fresh vegetables,

fruit, whole grains and lean proteins like fish and chicken.

3. Maintain a healthy weight for your height. If you are overweight, consider a weight loss programme. Losing weight can lower your risk for heart disease and some cancers.
4. Stop smoking. Quitting means you'll reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers. Within 10 years of quitting, your risk for lung cancer is half that of someone who continues smoking.
5. Check your alcohol consumption. Drinking too much alcohol can lead to high blood pressure, liver damage and cancer of the oesophagus, colon and liver. Men should not exceed two standard drinks per day. A standard measure would be 340ml of beer, 125ml of wine or 25ml of spirits.
6. Have regular checks for cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure.
7. Keep hydrated. Drink six to eight glasses of water every day.



### Lung health

Your two lungs work with your heart to provide oxygen to all parts of your body. Carbon dioxide is transported from cells

back to the lungs via the veins and expelled through the mouth. Lung diseases and disorders can affect the working of your lungs making breathing more difficult. Some lung diseases can negatively affect the heart and some may be fatal.

### Lung health tips

- Follow the same guidelines as noted in heart health section.
- See your doctor if you have a nagging cough, experience shortness of breath or wheeze when you breathe.



### Mental health

High stress levels are inevitable if you are juggling a demanding schedule along with personal commitments. When work-life balance is out of sync, you'll likely feel the effects of negative stress. This type of stress can be harmful to your health. Chronic stress also affects your mental health, causing worry, anxiety and possibly depression. This can lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders, sleep problems, fatigue, high blood pressure and erectile dysfunction.

### 5 ways to better mental health

1. Get a handle on stress. Take time for rest and rejuvenation.
2. Get exercise. Just a 15 or 20 walk daily can help you cope better with stress and lessen the effects of depression.
3. Avoid eating on the run or reaching for junk food. Healthy snacks between meals can keep your blood sugar stable and help you stay more focused.
4. Stress can take a toll on your immune system, making you more susceptible to illness. Consider a daily immune booster or multivitamin supplement to help you cope better with stress.
5. If you use alcohol, drugs or prescription medication to stay on top of things, consider a visit to your healthcare professional for advice.
6. Speak to a professional counsellor through your employee wellbeing programme for confidential advice and support for dealing with daily pressures and commitments.

### Sexual health

Men's sexual health relates to a fulfilling sex life – from both a physical and psychological perspective. Anything which prevents or

influences this has an impact on sexual health and fulfilment. Good sexual health includes the desire for sex and the ability to get and sustain an erection long enough to complete sexual relations. Good sexual health also involves practising safe sex.



#### Health tips

1. Most men do experience erectile problems at some point in their lives. These may be related to tiredness, anxiety, stress, depression, prescription medication or physical issues. Many men are too embarrassed to see the doctor and avoid the appointment. It is important to note that most problems can be addressed and you can go on to enjoy a healthy sex life. Erectile dysfunction may also be an early warning for other illnesses so don't delay seeing your doctor.
2. If you are 50 years or older, you should have an annual prostate check. Know the warning signs for prostate problems. These include: dribbling urine, hesitancy in urine flow starting, weak flow or more frequent urination. See your doctor if you are concerned.



#### Resources

1. <http://www.webmd.com>
2. <http://www.mayoclinic.org>
3. CANSA <http://www.cansa.org.za>,
4. Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa



#### When to see the doctor

If you notice a change in your appetite, bowel movements or experience chest pains or digestive problems, dizziness or headaches, make an appointment to see your healthcare professional. Symptoms may not be an indication of anything serious and can be treated. If they are of a serious nature, early diagnosis is important.



#### Men and cancer

According to CANSA, South African men have a one in eight risk of getting cancer in their lifetimes. The top cancers affecting men in SA are prostate, Kaposi sarcoma (a type of skin cancer), lung, colorectal, testicular, penile and anal. Your doctor or CANSA can assist with screening tests for cancer.



#### Cancer screen tests

- A prostate specific antigen (PSA) test is a finger prick blood test or blood test to determine elevated levels of PSA, which may indicate inflammation or cancer. All men should get tested from the age of 40 at interims advised by your doctor. Annual tests are recommended after age 50. You may need more frequent tests or earlier tests if you have a family member with a history of prostate cancer. Research conducted and data studied on a new blood test called IsoPSA have revealed a better detection of prostate cancer by being able to distinguish between cancerous and benign conditions. The test also picks up those patients at greater risk for the disease. The test is likely to replace current tests in the future.
- A digital rectal exam (DRE) is performed by a doctor to check the prostate for lumps or abnormalities. The doctor places a gloved finger inside the rectum to feel for an enlargement of the prostate. Men over 50 are advised to have the test annually.
- A screen for occult blood in the stool should be done annually from age 50. If you have a family member diagnosed with colon cancer, tell your doctor and he or she will advise you on when to start testing. This could be as early as 35 years of age. A positive result indicates the need for further testing and a colonoscopy.
- Men from age 15 to 39 need to conduct monthly testicular self-examinations after a bath or shower to detect small lumps which could indicate cancer. Consult your doctor if you notice any changes.
- If you notice changes in the symmetry, diameter or colour of moles or if they bleed, this could indicate **melanoma**, a type of skin cancer. See your doctor for a check. It is almost always treatable if detected early.
- Kaposi's sarcoma (KS) is type of skin cancer. Patches of abnormal tissue grow under the skin, in the lining of the mouth, nose, and throat or in other organs. See your doctor if you have skin lesions that change in colour from pink to brown or purple. They may appear as a slightly raised bump. KS also affects the lymph glands, lungs and digestive tract and may be a cause of anaemia.



Resource: Cancer Association of South Africa, <http://www.cansa.org.za>