



Men's  
Health

# An At-Home Fitness Renaissance

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work out, likely for good.

When lockdowns forced gyms to close, many instructors took their classes online, giving people a way to work out even when they couldn't hit the gym.

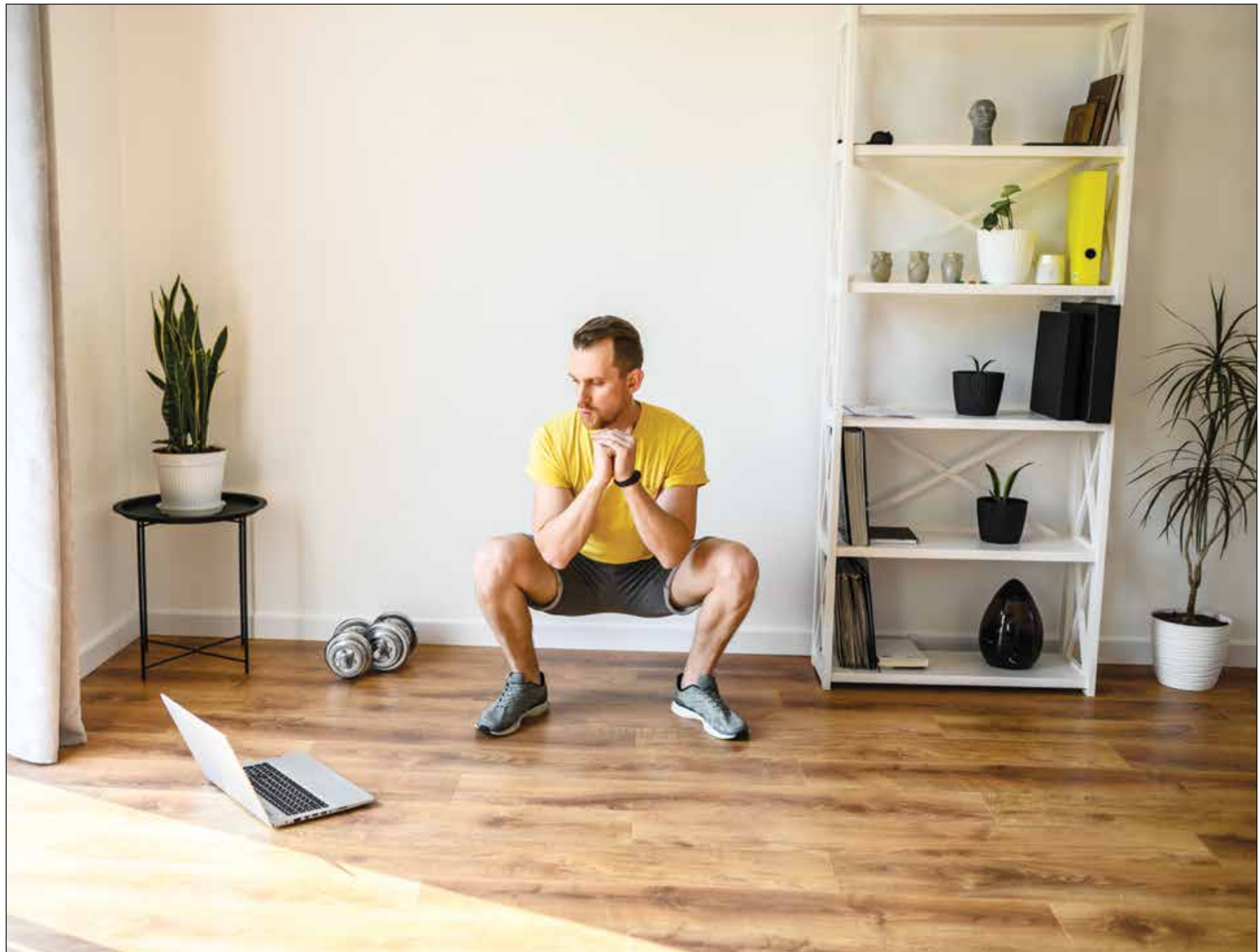
These at-home workouts are a far cry from a Jane Fonda or Richard Simmons VHS tapes of the 1980s and '90s. Today's connected workouts link you to other fitness enthusiasts via video and integrate health data from your wearable fitness tracker. Mens Health calls it "Fitness 2.0."

## THE TREND

On-demand workouts had been making their way onto the fitness scene, but the pandemic has forced gyms to transition their offerings online more and more.

Top fitness brands such as Orangetheory, Nike and Peloton offered their online classes for free during the early days of lockdowns, to help people shrug off the isolation blues and fight the "quarantine 15," a phenomenon that occurred as we tended to pack on pounds and be sedentary while stuck at home.

The fitness and nutrition app Daily Burn reported a 268% year-over-year increase in new members in March



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2020. And even as infection rates have declined and gyms have reopened, in many areas of the country, they still are operating at reduced capacity and continuing their online offerings.

## GET STARTED

You don't have to invest in

pricey equipment or even try a new service to get on board with the at-home fitness trend. In fact, the gym you already belong to likely has added online offerings during the pandemic. That means you might be able to connect online with your favorite instructor and keep moving.

If you are in the market for a full at-home setup with new equipment, you'll need to do some research first. Peloton started the connected cycling trend, but other providers weren't far behind. You can find a bike set up to connect through an app on your own device for around \$500.

Other connected devices also are trending, including treadmills and rowing machines. With any connected device, keep in mind you'll also need to pay a monthly subscription fee, usually between \$40 and \$50, to stay connected and access live workouts.

# Is Male Menopause Real?

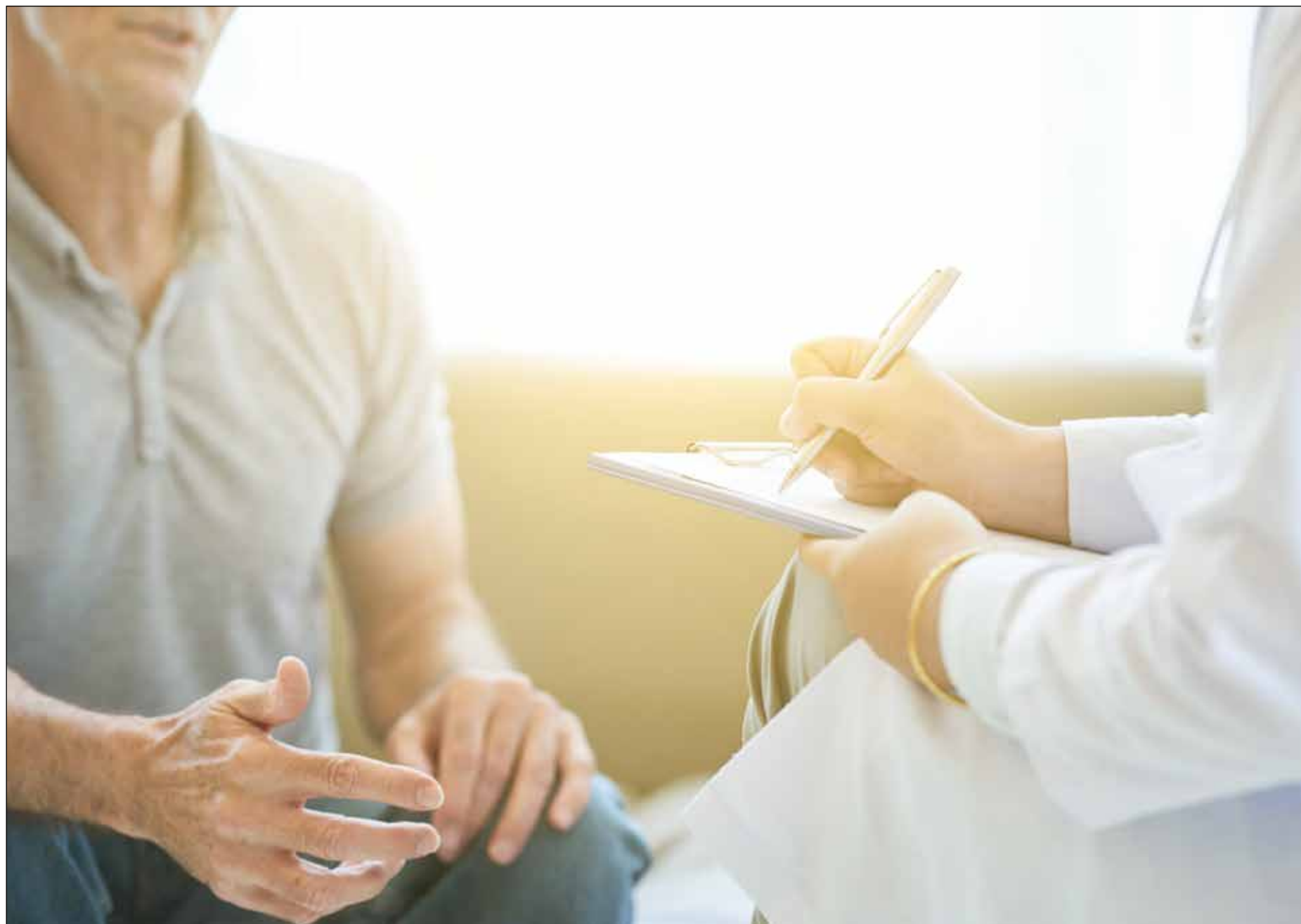
While menopause is more widely known, men also experience the effects of changing hormone levels as they age.

Its official name is andropause, but in popular culture, it has been dubbed “manopause.” Tied to a drop in testosterone levels, andropause has led men to report similar symptoms to those women experience during menopause or perimenopause.

## THE SCIENCE

There are some important differences between “manopause” and menopause. While women experience a rapid decline in estrogen levels, men experience a much slower decline in testosterone, which can last for decades, and most older men have normal levels of testosterone, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Scientists are studying andropause, and there is some debate in the scientific community about whether it can be directly compared to menopause. What's clear, however, is that before the age of 40, men experience “a progressive reduction in testosterone and bioavailable testosterone levels,” as well as a protein that binds them and carries them throughout the body, writes UCLA medical professor Stanley G Korenman in the *Western Journal of Medicine*. “I dislike



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the term ‘male menopause’ because of its reference to cyclicity, and I have adopted ‘manopause’ as an umbrella term to describe age-related alterations whose exact nature is still to be determined.”

Research has shown that men may also experience a decline in estrogen levels around the same time, which contributes to symptoms.

## SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

Men experience sleepiness, muscle loss, less interest in sex, erectile dysfunction, mood changes, loss in muscle volume and bone density and increased body fat.

Doctors treat andropause with topical or injected testosterone replacement therapy, diet and exercise, and mental health treatment.

Testosterone therapy does come with some risks. A relatively small number of men experience acne, disturbed breathing during sleep, breast swelling or tenderness, swelling in the ankles and increased blood clotting due to high red blood cell counts, according to Harvard Medical School. One study was halted because of cardiac issues in patients, and scientists are still studying the

effects of testosterone on the risk of prostate cancer.

For men with low testosterone, the benefits of testosterone therapy usually outweigh the risks. For other men, the decision is not so clear. According to Harvard Medical School, “It offers men who feel lousy a chance to feel better, but that quick fix could distract attention from unknown long-term hazards.”

# Choosing a Diet

If you're looking to shed pounds, you'll need a combination of diet and exercise.

There are many diet options, from new and trendy to tried and true. Consider your goals and preferences when choosing a diet.

## CARB-FOCUSED DIETS

Diets such as low-carb, Atkins and Paleo focus on your intake of carbohydrates but do not restrict protein or fats. They are ideal for people with a lot of weight to lose and are effective for reducing belly fat. If you are loath to give up your bread, however, these diets are likely not for you. In addition, your LDL or "bad" cholesterol could go up due to increased fat intake.

## INTERMITTENT FASTING

Intermittent fasting is a trending diet method that focuses on restricting the time during which you can eat each day. A typical intermittent fasting method is to fast for 18 straight hours and eat for 6 hours of the day, known as 18/6 intermittent fasting. A more extreme version involves fasting for 24 hours at a time.

Intermittent fasting can have big weight loss results, but use this method with caution. Men's Health warns that the risks include hunger, overeating when not fasting, feeling tired or irritable and becoming intoxicated more quickly while drinking.

## TECHNOLOGY-BASED DIETS

A new wave of diets uses technology and psychology to shape food choices. Noom claims to create "long-term results through habit and behavior change, not restric-

tive dieting." It's based in cognitive behavioral therapy and aims to help you make small changes to reach your goal. The app rates food on a color-based scale and asks users to take quizzes about fitness and nutrition.

The newest incarnation of Weight Watchers employs a smartphone app to help users track their daily food intake and exercise. The Smart Points system gives users a daily allotment of points, as well as extra weekly points and earned

points for exercise. It even includes a barcode scanner so dieters can simply scan the barcode of a packaged food to find its Smart Points value.

Before starting any diet or exercise plan, visit your doctor to talk about your health.



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# Avoiding Health Risks

Men live on average five years less than women. Part of that is due to biological factors, but there are some diseases and health conditions for which men are most at-risk.

The Mayo Clinic offers the following tips for men to avoid some of the biggest health risks.

**Don't smoke.** Men who smoke have increased risk for heart disease, cancer, lower respiratory diseases, stroke and diabetes, which are the first, second, fourth, fifth and sixth leading causes of death among men in the United States in 2015, respectively, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. If you smoke or use tobacco, ask your doctor to help you quit.

**Eat a healthy diet.** Diets focused on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, high-fiber foods and lean protein are healthiest. The Mayo Clinic recommends limiting foods high in saturated and trans fats, added sugar and sodium.

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That includes heart conditions such as coronary artery disease and heart attack. The best way to reduce



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your risk is to lose excess weight and keep it off.

**Get exercise.** Exercise helps with weight control and lowering your risk of heart disease and stroke, and according to the Mayo Clinic, may reduce your risk for some types of cancer. The CDC says that adults need 150 minutes a

week of moderate-intensity activity. The Mayo Clinic recommends choosing activities you enjoy.

**Limit alcohol.** The CDC warns that alcohol use increases the risk of mouth, throat, esophagus, liver and colon cancer, which are more common among men, as well

as prostate cancer. Excessive drinking also can increase your blood pressure and increase your risk of heart attack and stroke, according to the Mayo Clinic. 'Limit alcoholic drinks to no more than two a day up to age 65, and one a day after that. One drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces

of wine or 1.5 ounces of liquor.

**Manage stress.** Long-term stress can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diabetes and reduced immune system function, according to the Mayo Clinic. It's imperative to keep stress under control to maintain good health.

# Men and Mental Health

Mental health is an issue fraught with complications for men.

Men are less likely to be diagnosed with mental illness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but 3.5 times more likely than women to commit suicide. They also are less likely to get mental health treatment.

Between 1999 and 2017, the suicide rates for men ages 10-74 increased by an average of 26%, according to the CDC. The nonprofit Mental Health America says that more than 6 million men in the U.S. experience symptoms of depression each year, and more than 3 million experience an anxiety.

Of Americans diagnosed with substance abuse disorder and mental illness, more than half are men, according to the American Psychological Association.

## THE STIGMA

Men may be less likely to seek help with mental illness because of an outdated social stigma attached to a diagnosis in men, according to the University of Rochester Medical Center, which notes, "Some may see it as a sign of weakness rather than a treatable illness."

A study published in the American Journal of Men's Health found that men struggle to establish social connections



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tions due to fear of being judged as emotionally vulnerable, weak and "unmasculine." Research has shown that social connectedness helps people get support for mental health struggles.

## GETTING HELP

The most important step toward getting help for yourself or a loved one is recognizing the signs of a mental dis-

order. The National Institute of Mental Health offers the following list of red flags.

- Anger, irritability or aggressiveness.
- Noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite.
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless or on edge.
- Increased worry or feeling

stressed.

- Misuse of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Sadness or hopelessness.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions.
- Engaging in high-risk activities.
- Aches, headaches, digestive problems without a clear cause.

• Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior.

• Thoughts or behaviors that interfere with work, family or social life.

• Unusual thinking or behaviors that concern other people.

If you or someone you know is having a mental health crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-8255.

# Plant-Based Eating

Whether you're looking to lose weight or just eat healthier, a plant-based diet could be the solution for you.

A plant-based, or plant-forward, diet focuses on foods primarily from plants. This includes fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes and beans.

"It doesn't mean that you are vegetarian or vegan and never eat meat or dairy," writes licensed dietitian and nutritionist Katherine D. McManus for Harvard University. "Rather, you are proportionately choosing more of your foods from plant sources."

## BENEFITS

Documentaries about plant-based diets, including *Forks over Knives* and *Cowspiracy*, have led to a rise in popularity of plant-based eating. A plant-based diet has been shown to have positive effects for weight and cardiac health, and even the environment.

Kaiser Permanente physician Benjamin Ha reports that he has seen patients reverse health conditions such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, and dramatically reduced their need for prescription medications. "I am convinced that a whole-foods, plant-based diet is an effective and evidence-based intervention that physicians should recommend to all patients to



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improve health and wellness," he said.

## HOW TO START

You may choose to incorporate more plant-based foods into your diet or go vegan altogether. Whichever diet you choose, you can transition your eating habits slowly.

EverydayHealth.com offers the following descriptions of

various diet options.

**Vegetarian diet:** includes cheese, eggs, milk and plant-based protein but not meat, such as chicken, pork and beef. Instead of meat.

**Vegan diet:** an exclusively plant-based diet with no animal products, including milk, cheese and honey, and exclusively eat plants as part of a vegan lifestyle.

**Raw vegan diet:** a vegan diet with only raw plant-based foods.

**Flexitarian diet:** a flexible diet with primarily plant-based foods, reduced meat intake and some animal products.

Ha recommends a gradual shift to plant-based eating. He tells patients to start by eating more of four food groups — fruits, vegetables, whole grains

and beans — and less of four other groups — animal protein, dairy, processed foods and oil/fried foods. Writing for *Permanente Journal*, Ha says, "I clarify with patients that my intention is not to convince them to become a vegan or vegetarian, but to encourage them to focus on eating more unprocessed plant-based foods."

# Men and Alcohol Abuse

Men are more likely than women to abuse alcohol, putting them at risk for a host of health problems.

In 2019, 7% of men had an alcohol use disorder, compared with 4% of women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Men also are more likely to binge drink, and account for 75% of alcohol-related deaths.

## THE RISKS

The CDC calls alcohol use “one of the most important preventable risk factors for cancer,” as it increases the risk of cancers that are more common among men, include cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver and colon, as well as prostate cancer.

In the short term, alcohol abuse increases the risk of injuries, such as car accidents, falls, drowning and burns, violence including homicide, sexual assault and domestic violence, alcohol poisoning and risky sexual behaviors.

In the long term, alcohol abuse also puts men at higher risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, digestive problems, sexual and reproductive health problems, learning and memory problems and mental health problems.



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## IDENTIFYING ALCOHOLISM

Some levels of drinking that might be deemed socially acceptable still can be problematic and indicative of an alcohol abuse disorder. According to the CDC, binge drinking means, for men, drinking five or more drinks during a single occasion. Heavy drinking for men is

defined as consuming 15 or more drinks per week.

Warning signs include craving alcohol, losing control and not being able to stop once one starts drinking, and feeling anxious and irritable when you are not drinking.

## GETTING HELP

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration notes that men face barriers to treatment, since they are socialized to be “independent, self-sufficient, stoic and invulnerable.” Addiction recovery programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous can help men take control of their recovery and establish social relationships to help maintain their sobriety.

Some men prefer direct kinds of therapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy or motivational enhancement therapy, to treat alcoholism, as opposed to emotional support therapy, according to the American Addiction Centers.

If you or someone you know needs help with alcohol addiction, call the SMHSA national help line at 1-800-662-4357.