

# Men's Health



# Being Heart Healthy

Our understanding of the cause and treatments for heart disease has never been more comprehensive.

Yet, heart disease is still the leading cause of death among men. Advanced prescriptive medicines are working wonders, but heart health really comes down to making good decisions, both with exercise and diet, and following your doctor's orders. Here's a checklist of milestones that will get you on the right track toward better heart health.

## STOP SMOKING

Smoking is still one of the main indicators for developing high blood pressure. Stop smoking now, or never start. High blood pressure is a contributing factor in many strokes and heart attacks. If you've tried to quit, but struggled to move on, look to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for free tips and a useful guide to locate resources in your area. Go to: [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit\\_smoking/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/index.htm). Professional caregivers are available to support your efforts. There are also new medications that can help in your journey toward a smoke-free future.

## GET OUT THERE

The benefits of exercise are many, and heart health is one



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of them. Losing weight leads to better system function throughout the body, including your heart. Your circulation will improve as you reach new cardiovascular milestones. The best news is that you don't have to be an Olympic-level athlete to reap these many benefits. The American Heart Association's recommendations

include at least 150 minutes of moderately intense activity every week, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. Even lightly intensive activity like walking goes a long way to improving your overall health, and that includes your heart.

## LOWER YOUR STRESS

High-stress situations can

lead to elevated blood pressure, opening the door for potential stroke or heart attacks. Stress is also linked with negative behaviors like heavy drinking, smoking and overeating. These coping mechanisms can have a negative impact on your heart. If stress can't be avoided, turn to activities that provide relief.

For some, that includes exercise. But leisure activities, hobbies and club activities are also known to help with everyday stress. Try yoga, prayer or meditation. If you're still struggling with feeling stressed out, consider talking things over with a professional. Therapy has helped many people find ways to better manage these feelings.

# Male Menopause: Fact or Fiction?

Menopause is a widely known period where women experience hormonal changes. Men can experience similar changes, which some have jokingly described as “man-opause.”

The official condition, however, is known as “andropause.”

## WHAT IS ANDROPAUSE?

Andropause is tied to a natural drop in testosterone levels in men, leading some to experience symptoms that are similar to those reported by women during peri-menopause or menopause. There are critical distinctions, however, as women experience a more rapid decline in levels of estrogen. For men, testosterone levels drop more slowly, in some cases over a period of decades. Men may also experience a drop in estrogen, which may lead to similar symptoms.

Scientists are still exploring the parameters of andropause, and debate remains among experts as to how closely it may be compared to traditional menopause. For instance, many older men have typical levels of testosterone. But for others, a progressive loss of testosterone has been confirmed after the age of 40. They may also have less of the protein that carries



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testosterone throughout a man's body. We're still learning more about these age-related changes.

## ANDROPAUSE SYMPTOMS

Men may experience muscle loss or lower muscle volume, sleepiness, erectile dysfunction or a diminished interest in sex, increased body fat and lower bone density. Doctor-prescribed replace-

ment therapies include injected or topical testosterone, along with a regimen of exercise, diet and mental health therapy.

## TREATMENT ISSUES

Testosterone replacement therapy is not without a small amount of risks. Harvard Medical School reports that some men may develop acne, breast tenderness or swelling, difficulty breathing while

asleep, ankle swelling and increased clotting because of high counts of red-blood cells. One andropause study was halted when patients developed cardiac issues.

Scientists are also still trying to determine what impact, if any, testosterone has on the chances of developing prostate cancer.

## BE VIGILANT

For most men dealing with

low testosterone, the positive impacts of replacement therapy seem to outweigh any of these risks. But doctors are quick to remind patients that some of these symptoms are indicators of other long-term problems. Consult with your doctor, discuss your symptoms and personal medical history, and then stay on a regular checkup schedule so that progress and any setbacks can be closely monitored.

# Changing Your Diet

As the name implies, plant-based diets focus on foods grown on trees and in the ground.

That generally includes vegetables and fruits, seeds and nuts, whole grains, beans and legumes. But even “plant-forward” diets that include other foods but still attempt to include more plants can have notable impacts. You don’t have to be a vegetarian or a vegan to reap these benefits, even if you still make room for occasional indulgences of dairy and meat.

## A GROWING TREND

Doctors say that health issues like high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes can be improved with plant-based diets, while also reducing the requirement for medication. Evidence-based studies continue, and they’re increasingly showing that plant-based diets are effective at improving wellness and health — even if you’re not exclusively eating plants. In the meantime, plant-based diets have been mainstreamed through widely seen films like “Cowspiracy” and “Forks Over Knives.” More men are discovering that these dietary choices can have positive impacts on cardiac health and weight, and may also help the environment.

## GETTING STARTED

If you’re not sure about



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becoming a full-on vegan, consider simply adding more plant-based foods to your existing diet. Slowly transition into these new habits. In the meantime, here’s a breakdown of all the terms: Vegetarians eat plant-based protein while avoiding meat like beef, pork and chicken. They eat eggs, milk and cheese. On the other hand, vegans have an exclusively plant-focused diet that

doesn’t include animal products like honey, cheese and milk. They only eat plants or plant-based products.

## FLEXIBLE OPTIONS

Some may choose the so-called “flexitarian diet,” which focuses on plant-based foods while reducing the intake of meat and animal products. This is the best way to transition toward vegetarian

or vegan diets, gradually replacing animal proteins, processed foods, dairy and fried foods with vegetables, fruits, beans and whole grains. Don’t underestimate small shifts in this direction, since eating more unprocessed, plant-based foods will produce clear health benefits.

## CLEAR BENEFITS

The National Institutes of

Health reports that plant-based diets provide a low-risk opportunity to improve body mass index, cholesterol and blood pressure. Simply eating better may also help reduce the need for medications meant to treat heart disease and chronic issues. This is particularly important for those who are dealing with high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity.

# Not Just Skin Deep

There's an increased risk of melanoma for men under 49.

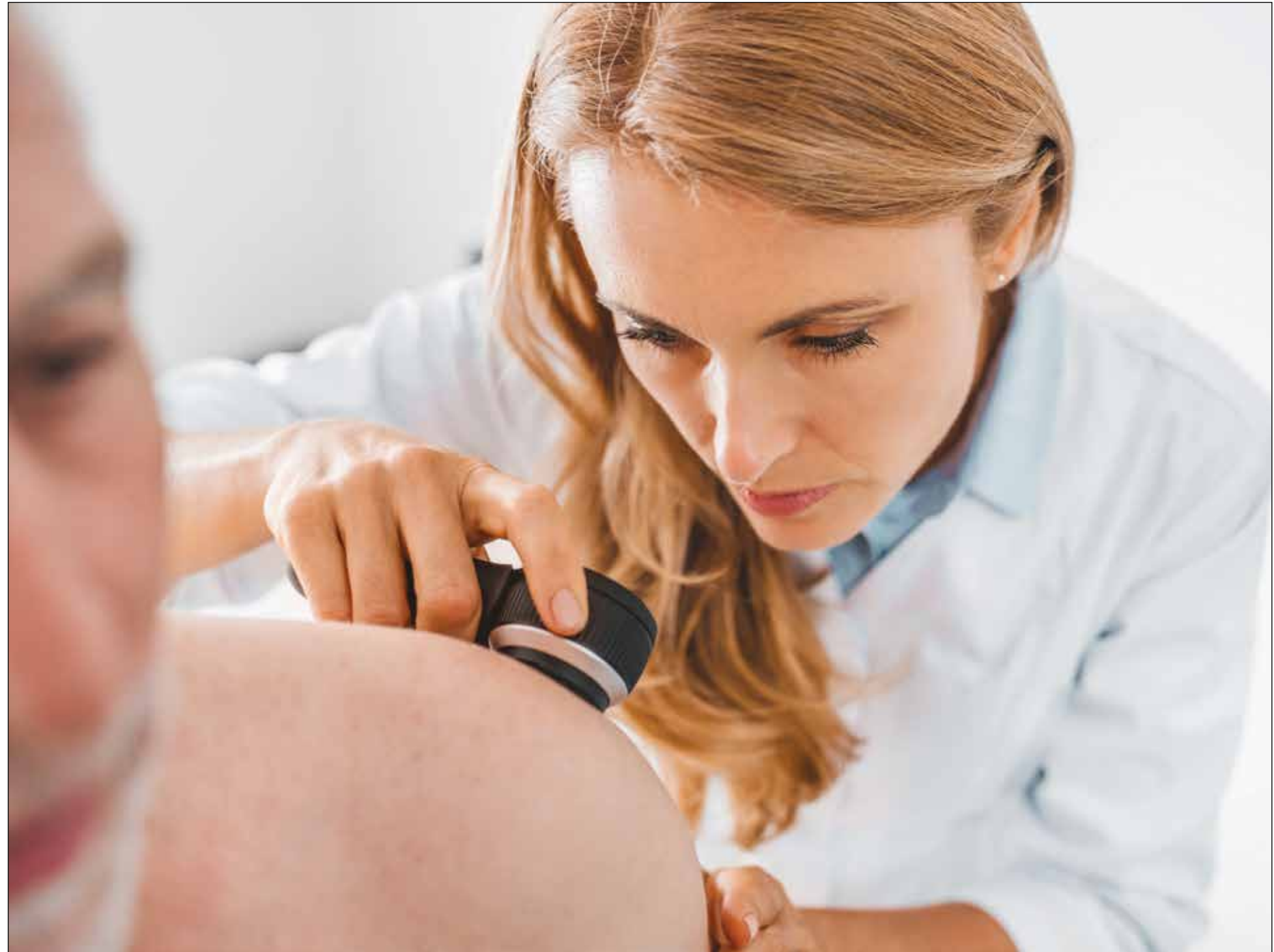
In fact, the risk is higher for this age group than any other form of cancer. Men are more than 50% as likely to die from melanoma as women in the same age bracket. The highest risk is for 15-to-39 year old men, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation — often because they tend to spend more time outside than other male age groups.

## EDUCATION IS KEY

Like many other cancers, melanoma is often cured when caught early and then aggressively treated. But education is key. Men should have a deep understanding of what these cancers look like in their early stages, and the ways they can limit their risks. There's also something to be learned about why men can be more susceptible.

## INCREASING NUMBERS

Men's skin contains more of key elements that may lead to cancers, including collagen and elastin. The American Academy of Dermatology confirms that these differences can make ultraviolet rays more dangerous. Unfortunately, men also tend to be less familiar with these dangers, particularly when it comes to exposure to the sun. In general, men are much more likely to develop melanoma than females. And it's not limited to



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the young. Skin cancer incidence rates increase steeply in men ages 55 to 59.

## THE ROLE OF GENETICS

The most common form of skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma. Family history plays a role as a predictor, according to the National Cancer Institute. That's why it's so

important to research your own family's history with skin cancer, then share the information with your doctor. If needed, a dermatologist can develop an examination and treatment strategy to help ensure early detection and future wellness. People with this family history may relapse at a 20% rate within their first

year after being diagnosed.

## TIPS FOR PREVENTION

It's important to protect yourself while working or playing outdoors, in particular over longer periods of time. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen, ensuring that it's rated SPF 15 or higher. If you're going to be swimming, seek

out protection that's water resistant — and be prepared to reapply often. Other important protective options include sunglasses (opt for UV-blocking lenses) and wider-brimmed hats. Schedule visits for regular examinations since early detection so often leads to successful skin-cancer treatment.

# Dealing with Depression

Depression has begun to lose the stigma it unfortunately always had, particularly for men.

Unfortunately, some men still have difficulty opening up about their personal issues. Both men and women are subject to depression, with symptoms including hopelessness, fatigue, sadness, lack of sleep, and difficulty in enjoying pleasurable activities. But men and women experience these things in very different ways.

## A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Men are more likely to deal with depression by taking part in escapist, unhealthy behaviors as a way of coping. More than women, they tend to overindulge in alcohol, tobacco and drugs, or to turn to risky behavior involving sex and violence. Men are also less likely to enter into therapy, and thus are less likely to be diagnosed with depression. Sadness is an indicator of depression, but not always the main symptom. Men may instead deal with digestive issues, headaches, long-term pain or general irritability.

## DOWNPLAYING SYMPTOMS

Men may also downplay symptoms and warning signs. They're often less likely to admit health issues, including those indicating depression.



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Ignoring all of this often leads to more negative behavior — particularly as symptoms worsen. At the same time, men can be reluctant to discuss their health issues. Some won't even discuss their feelings with family or friends, making it even less likely that they'd open up with a health-care professional. This might be because of childhood lessons to suppress their emo-

tions, since discussing emotions wasn't traditionally considered "manly." Finding a resolution to long-standing problems can be difficult.

## RESISTING TREATMENT

Men may also resist treatment for mental health issues. Even those who admit to anxiety or depression might still choose to avoid therapy because of the attached stig-

ma. Thankfully, male role models from the realms of entertainment, politics and sports have increasingly opened up about their own experiences.

## SEEKING SOLUTIONS

More men than ever recognize that hiding their issues tends to make these things worse. It's becoming a healthy sign when men choose to deal

with these things head-on. A solution may involve therapy, medication or both, depending on the individual situation. But medical advancements and an array of new counseling options have made it easier than ever for men to break out of their collective shells. If you're experiencing depression, talk to a friend or family member — or discuss it with your physician.

# Caffeine's Pros and Cons

Coffee can become part of our everyday life, and not just because it tastes so great.

Many men rely upon it for an early morning or afternoon boost when we're feeling mentally or physically drained. Then there are those who take it to the next level with high-octane energy drinks. Everyone should be aware of the documented side effects.

## HELPING WITH MEMORY

Food and Drug Administration experts say about 80% of adults in the U.S. consume caffeine in some form on a daily basis. It impacts human nervous systems almost immediately, reaching a peak of effectiveness within roughly an hour of consumption, according to the Harvard Medical School. But there are other notable impacts. The Journal of Gerontology reports that consuming the amount of caffeine recommended by experts can also help deter dementia. Adults 65 and older who were surveyed reported less memory loss after ingesting two to three servings of eight-ounce cups of coffee on a daily basis over a decade. Conversely, those who drank a half a cup or less said they had more symptoms of dementia.

## HEART HEALTH

Caffeine can have a negative impact on men's heart health.



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These reactions vary, of course, depending on the subsection of men. General confirmed effects included temporary elevation of blood pressure and heart rate, and that can be particularly worrisome for those dealing with cardiopulmonary disease. Regular consumption of coffee among healthy people doesn't generally lead to arrhythmias,

according to the Journal of the American Heart Association. (The body eliminates as much as half of your caffeine intake within four to six hours.) Your blood pressure may rise initially while drinking coffee, but regular drinkers are 50% less likely to die from heart failure as those who don't imbibe, according to Men's Health.

## MANAGING YOUR COFFEE

If you are worried about caffeine, consult your personal physician to discuss its impact on your cardiovascular system.

Be honest about your relationship with coffee, and how your schedule impacts your stress levels and caffeine

intake. They may make specific recommendations about how to manage your consumption.

The American Medical Association specifically recommends that people avoid energy drinks, since they have a more negative impact on electrocardiograms than teas or coffee.

# Prostate Health

Early discovery is key with prostate cancer, a silent killer of men.

The illness's slow development process works in our favor — but only if you get a regular exam.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland that rests below the bladder, producing a fluid with creates semen when combined with sperm. Cancer of this gland is diagnosed more than 190,000 a year in the U.S., according to the American Cancer Society. Science hasn't told us what exactly causes these cancers, but successful treatment programs have followed. Early detection is so important because the risk is elevated with age.

Currently, the American Cancer Society places the average age of diagnosis at 66. Some six in 10 of patients with this form of cancer are 65 and older. Doctors have now begun encouraging prostate exams for men when they reach age 50 in an effort to bring these numbers down. Anyone with a family history, and thus a higher risk, should begin these screenings at an earlier age.

## INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Prostate cancer has become one of the most common cancers among U.S. men, only behind skin cancer. Roughly one in every eight men will be



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diagnosed, according to the American Cancer Society. Screening can have a huge impact.

Here's how it works: A prostate-specific blood test may be administered to check for unique antigen levels. You'll be asked not to heavily exercise or ejaculate for 48 hours before testing, to ensure accu-

racy. The most common method, however, is by digital rectal exam. Physicians evaluate the prostate's size and shape, looking for abnormalities including lumps, hard spots or a growth. Neither of these tests serves as a diagnosis for prostate cancer, but instead offer indicators that help medical professionals determine if

a biopsy is required.

## OPTIONS FOR TREATMENT

Experts believe that you can lower your risks with a healthier lifestyle. Focus on so-called "superfoods" like broccoli, kale and Brussels sprouts with antioxidants believed to inhibit cancer. Other foods with posi-

tive health benefits include red fruits and vegetables. They're understood to fight off free radicals.

If you receive a positive diagnosis, expect your doctor to prescribe radiation and chemotherapy. Decisions on how to move forward will be based on patient age and the detected cancer's stage.