



MEN'S HEALTH



men's health

Ways to Live Happier, Healthier & Longer

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It's Up to You: Take Charge of Your Health

It's natural to hope your aches, pains and other problems will simply go away on their own if you ignore them. But most do not. Take charge of your health by calling the doctor when you need to, preparing well for medical visits and doing all you can to stay in good health.

6 SIGNS YOU SHOULDN'T IGNORE

Here are six symptoms that should prompt a call to your doctor:

- 1. Continued weight loss.** Your weight can go up or down 2-3 pounds in the course of a day. However, continued weight loss that can't be explained by diet or exercise may be a sign of depression, diabetes, cancer or an overactive thyroid.
- 2. Persistent or unusual headaches.** Any sudden or extremely painful headache warrants immediate medical attention — especially if you don't usually get headaches, if the pain causes you to miss work or social activities, and over-the-counter painkillers don't help, or if the pain is different from your usual headache.
- 3. Mysterious bleeding.** Call your doctor if you notice any rectal bleeding, blood in the urine or blood when you vomit or cough. Although these can be signs of something simple, such as hemorrhoids in the case of rectal bleeding, they can also signal something more serious, such as cancerous growths.
- 4. Abdominal pain.** Abdominal pain that occurs before a meal and is relieved by food may simply be an ulcer or GERD, gastroesophageal reflux disease. But other kinds of stomach distress may indicate more serious conditions, such as heart problems, gallstones, intestinal obstructions, infection or even cancer.

5. **Skin changes.** A mouth or skin sore that won't heal, a change in the size or color of a mole or wart, or a lump or thickening in the breast or elsewhere should all be checked by a physician.
6. **Sadness.** Everyone feels blue now and then. But if you feel sad or irritable most of the time (for at least two weeks) and have lost interest in activities that once gave you pleasure, you may be suffering from depression. Although serious, it is highly treatable, so speak to your doctor without delay. ♦

THIS OLD MAN

On average, men live six fewer years than women. Here's how guys can take better care of themselves and enjoy a longer, healthier life:

Keep the marriage strong. Studies have shown that married men in their 50s, 60s and 70s tend to outlive their bachelor counterparts. Researchers attribute this finding to a home environment that encourages healthy behavior, good nutrition and being cared for in times of illness.

Give blood. Studies suggest that donating blood may reduce your risk of heart disease, the No. 1 killer. **Possible reason:** It rids the body of excess iron, which plays a role in blood clotting that can lead to heart attacks.

Keep learning. According to a Duke University study on aging, longevity is linked with continued intellectual activities. **Ideas:** Take an evening class ... do puzzles ... play word games ... read.

Get regular checkups. Studies show that men are at least 25 percent less likely than women to visit a doctor. Therefore, men are less likely to have regular medical checkups and get screening tests for prostate cancer and other serious diseases.

Be socially active. According to research, getting out more may boost the quality and length of your life. It also increases the likelihood that you'll eat right and see your doctor regularly — wise moves. ♦

WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WISHES YOU KNEW

Are you getting the most from your doctor? It can depend on how active a role you take during office visits. **Reason:** Nearly three-quarters of correct diagnoses depend entirely on what patients tell physicians. Here's what you should know before your next visit:

How to get ready. The day before your appointment, write a list of your concerns, starting with the most important. Jot down the answers to questions your doctor will almost certainly ask:

- *What is your main symptom?*
- *When did it start?*
- *Have you ever had it before?*
- *Does it travel anywhere else on your body?*
- *Is it constant, or does it come and go?*
- *What makes it worse? Better?*
- *What time of day is it the worst?*
- *Any change in thirst, appetite or weight?*
- *Any effect on your activities at work or home?*

What to take with you. Bring your list along with a record of any medications you're taking so your doctor may review them. **Better:** Bring your prescriptions in their original containers.

What to discuss. Talk openly about your symptoms, family health history, diet and sensitive areas such as alcohol use, smoking and sexual practices.

What to ask. If the facts are unclear, ask the doctor to define medical terms, draw a diagram or provide written information. For treatment or screening recommendations, inquire about options, costs and possible risks, benefits and side effects.

How to remember. One estimate says that patients forget roughly half of what they're told during a visit. **Helpful:** Take notes ... use a small cassette recorder ... summarize for the doctor what you think was said ... have a close relative or friend accompany you.

When to follow up. Don't hesitate to call your doctor to review or clarify any points. And check in without delay if you're concerned about changes in your condition, a medication that isn't working or side effects you're experiencing. ♦



A Fact of Life

Sexual function changes as men age. The response tends to be slower and not as robust, even if the desire is there. But there are several easy ways to address erectile dysfunction (ED):

- **Avoid alcohol.** It interferes with the normal sexual response.
- **Don't smoke.** Cigarettes interfere with the normal biochemical erectile response.
- **Watch medications.** Some medications, such as blood pressure pills and antidepressants, can cause ED.
- **Consider help.** Drugs such as Viagra work by increasing blood flow.

Just remember: The most important sex organ is above the shoulders. How you view intimacy is just as important as the act itself.