



**PRINCIPLE  
FOR MEN'S HEALTH™**

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In early 2005, I and other physicians at the Nebraska Medical Association formed a section on Men's Health. It's widely known that men, in general, take a more passive approach to their health, especially when it comes to visiting a doctor. We formed our section in the hopes that we could reach out not only to the public, but to our fellow physicians as well, to help educate and remind them about the importance of taking care of themselves and visiting their physician on a regular basis.

What does one call a highly educated, financially successful person with easy access to the healthcare system, who yet fails to see a physician regularly? Look in the mirror—it is you and I. As physicians, we urge our patients to take ownership of the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of their lives. We should too.

I have developed what I call the **2,3,4,5 Principle of Men's Health** to help all men maintain their health. In the decade of their twenties, men should have an exam at least twice; in their thirties, three times; in their forties, four times; and in their fifties, they should visit their physician once a year. This information also applies to physicians! How many of you have stopped one of your colleagues in the

hallway to ask them about a medical condition or issue you have, instead of scheduling an appointment for a complete physical? Sadly, we are often the last people to follow our own recommendations about leading a healthy life or scheduling an appointment to see OUR physicians.

There are some simple guidelines men can follow to increase their chances of leading a healthy and long life. Average life expectancy for males is seven years less than females, and even though some women do not mind that statistic we need to narrow the gap! Smoking cessation and lifestyle management are a huge factor in these statistics, and that should always be a part of counseling patients. While the conditions I'm going to write about in this article aren't necessarily topics men discuss over a game of football, it's very important that men know the symptoms and risks for heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, erectile dysfunction or ED, prostate problems, and depression.

To avoid heart disease and high blood pressure, it's important to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level. According to the JNC-VII recommendations, that level should be 120mm Hg for systolic pressure

(when the heart contracts) and below 80 mm Hg for diastolic pressure (when the heart is between beats or relaxes). Diet and exercise also play a key role in preventing heart disease and high blood pressure. Try to reduce your intake of salt and salty foods, stop smoking and limit your alcohol consumption to two drinks per day. Also make time for exercise; combined with a healthy diet, exercise will help keep you at a healthy weight.

When it comes to controlling high cholesterol, there are several simple steps you can take. I recommend a complete breakdown of total cholesterol, and I also use the LIPOMED Profile for high-risk patients and those with a strong family history. Know your cholesterol numbers, which includes total cholesterol, LDL (bad), HDL (good) and triglyceride (a common fat). If you have high cholesterol, set goals with your physician to help reach healthy levels. Again, diet can play a key role in lowering cholesterol. Eating few foods high in saturated fats, such as meat, egg yolks and dairy products, is a great start. I recommend Omega-3 Fatty acids either in the form of dietary (more salmon, fish or herring), or taking tablets once a day. If you don't currently eat a diet full of fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, soy products and heart healthy fat, such as olive or canola oil, now is the time to incorporate these foods into your daily diet. As with heart disease and high blood pressure, you should achieve or maintain a healthy weight, avoid smoking, limit alcohol use and ask your doctor what medicine is right for you.

Another issue that affects men is diabetes. Did you know one in 11 men age 20 or older has this disease? I start with a fasting blood sugar, or a two-hour post prandial blood sugar. A HgbA1c is also a standard of care for confirmation. The good thing is that Type II diabetes is preventable if you take care of yourself properly. It's important to keep your blood sugar close to normal, get regular exercise, eat regular meals, eat less fat and sugar and eat more high fiber foods, such as fruits and vegetables, dried beans and whole grains. Be aware of warning signs for diabetes, which include frequent urination; being thirsty or hungry all the time; feeling weak, tired or irritated; losing weight without trying; and blurry vision from time to time. There are many treatments currently available in the form of medications and insulin, but all my diabetics see a dietician for nutritional counseling.

The 21st Century "oh by the way" diagnosis is erectile dysfunction, more commonly known as ED. You can't watch a football game, golf tournament or NASCAR race without seeing an advertisement for ED medications and, while many men are embarrassed to talk to their physician about this issue, it's a medical problem that can be treated. First we need to rule out underlying causes of ED, including smoking, drinking in excess, stress or even common medicines. It also can be related to other health problems I discussed previously in this article, including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression and vascular disease. If you think you have ED, see your physician. He can help!

Prostate issues, in general, affect older men: half of men aged 51 to 60 have an enlarged prostate, which makes it critical that men

over the age of 40 have annual prostate exams. Patients should seek medical advice if they notice symptoms that include an urgent need to urinate, frequent urination (especially at night), straining to begin urine flow, producing only a small amount of urine each time, feeling like you still need to urinate after you go, leaking or dribbling, or small amounts of blood in the urine.

Two "male only" cancers are prostate and testicular cancer. Risk factors for prostate cancer include being age 40 or older, being African American, having a family history of prostate cancer and consuming a diet high in fat. In some men, prostate cancer has no symptoms. In others, symptoms can include a dull pain in the lower pelvic area; urinating often; pain or burning when urinating; weak urine flow; blood in the urine or semen; pain during sexual climax; general pain in the lower back, hips or upper thighs; bone pain and loss of appetite and/or weight. An age-appropriate PSA and Digital Rectal Exam (DRE), can help save lives. Testicular cancer is most prevalent from age 15 -50, and self examinations should be taught to all men. I have all my young male patients start checking at their 7th grade physical. I also let them know it is ok to check the testicles and to not be embarrassed if they find anything they are concerned about.

Colon cancer is also a preventable cancer, if found early with fecal occult cards. Appropriate colonoscopies based on symptoms, age and family history are paramount for men and women. Testosterone deficiency could be considered the "Male Hormone Replacement" of the new century. I order testosterone levels and Sex Hormone Binding Globulin levels for most of the men who complain of decreased concentration, libido, depression, fatigue, and impotence.

The last topic I'd like to cover is depression, which affects one in 15 men each year. Depression can have a serious effect on a man's or a woman's daily life, making it difficult to complete even simple tasks at work or at home. Risk factors include a family history of depression, long periods of stress, loss of a loved one, alcohol or drug abuse, or other serious illnesses including heart disease, stroke, cancer, HIV, diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Symptoms of depression can include feeling sad or anxious most of the time; feeling irritated, angry or discouraged; loss of interest in normal activities; change in appetite or weight; trouble sleeping or sleeping too much; lack of energy or trouble making decisions or focusing.

I'll leave each of you with a challenge—if you haven't been to see your physician lately, schedule an appointment today! Share the **2,3,4,5 Principle of Men's Health** with your patients, but do not forget to apply it to yourself! Early detection and preventative care can keep you in the game of life.



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