

# YOUR HEALTH

Newsletter June 2021

 Health Partners



- **MEN'S HEALTH & WELLBEING**
- **CERVICAL CANCER/SCREENING  
(STANDALONE FLYER)**

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## Men\*: taking care of you

Evidence suggests that men are less likely to seek support for their health than women, although they tend to seek more help after retirement age. This is despite the life expectancy for men being lower than that of women, in part related to their social circumstances.

Men should feel able to seek support from their GP or other clinician as soon as they need it, just like anybody else. Identifying problems sooner rather than later means they are caught early and are, therefore, usually easier and quicker to be treated. Delay in seeking support could result in more serious symptoms, additional complications and more challenging treatment.

Let's take a look at some of the main issues men may face.

### Sexual health

Most men will experience some form of sexual health problem at some point in their lifetime, whether this be acute or chronic.

**Erectile dysfunction** is more common with age and is often easily treatable. There are various possible underlying causes for erectile dysfunction such as cardiovascular (heart) disease, diabetes, certain medications or other underlying health conditions or treatments.

Additionally, psychological symptoms associated with stress, depression and anxiety can result in erectile dysfunction. It is important you speak to your GP to try and identify any potential causes, which will then help them to provide appropriate treatment options. There are prescription medications available and your GP can refer you for specialist treatment and support if needed. Lifestyle changes may also help such as stopping smoking, cutting down alcohol and losing weight if needed.

**Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)** may or may not show symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- Discharge from the penis
- Pain on urination
- Rash/lump/blisters in the genital region
- Pain in the testicles.

It is important to seek support from a sexual health clinic or your GP if you suspect you may have an STI, as treatment may be required.

Practicing safe sex and getting regular sexual health assessments, if you are sexually active with more than one individual, can all help avoid contracting, or spreading, STIs.

**Other common sexual health problems** experienced by men include premature ejaculation, difficulty/lack of ejaculation and loss of libido.

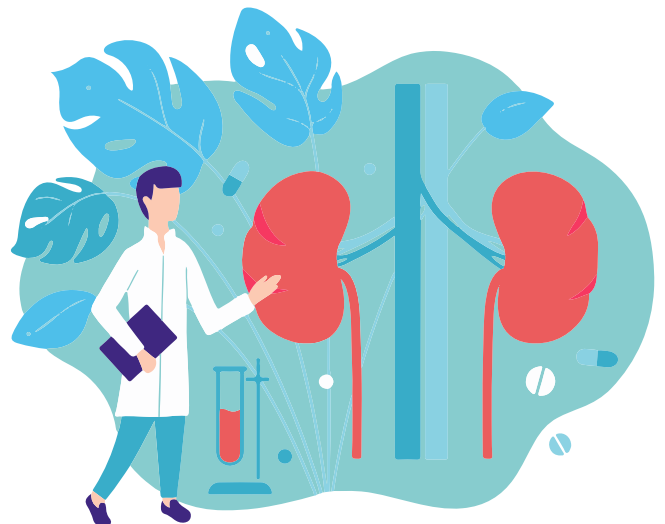
If you have any concerns about your sexual health, seek support from your GP as soon as possible. It can be embarrassing to discuss such concerns, but your GP will have seen many men with similar problems, many times previously and will be able to offer advice.

### Prostate and testicular health

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in UK males (26%), primarily affecting men aged 45 and over. For men between the ages of 15 and 44, testicular cancer is the most common cancer diagnosis.

**Prostate health:** the prostate is a walnut-sized gland, whose function is to produce fluid, which mixes with sperm during ejaculation to create semen. Prostate function is governed by the male hormone testosterone. The prostate sits just beneath the bladder and the urethra (the tube from the bladder to the penis) runs through the centre of the prostate gland. Hence, the most common symptoms experienced relating to prostate health are related to urination, e.g.

- Not being able to urinate or difficulty doing so such as straining or delay
- Poor urinary flow
- Increased frequency or urgency to urinate, particularly during the night
- Leaking following urination
- A feeling like the bladder has not been emptied fully
- And/or pain on urination.



These symptoms are most commonly due to an enlarged prostate (commonly caused by benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) - a non-cancerous growth of cells) and can be easily managed with lifestyle changes, medications if required or occasionally surgery if this is deemed necessary.

However, other causes can also include prostatitis (infection of the prostate gland) or prostate cancer, so it is important to seek advice from your GP as soon as possible if you develop any symptoms.

Prostate cancer is easily treatable, especially if caught early. One in eight men are affected in the UK and, although survival rates have never been better, the UK still experiences over 12,000 deaths per year as a result of prostate cancer.

The causes of prostate cancer are not fully understood. Evidence suggests that it occurs more frequently in men over the age of 50, with most diagnoses being made between the ages of 65 and 69.

**Testicular health:** it's important you check regularly for any changes to your testicles. The ideal time to check is just after a warm bath or shower: hold your scrotum in the palm of your hand and check each testicle by rolling it between the thumb and fingers.

It's perfectly normal for testicles to be a different size and length; however, if you notice any changes such as swelling, lumps, hardening or pain, it is important that you seek the advice of your GP as soon as possible.

These symptoms are commonly a sign of infection, inflammation, fluid build-up (hydrocele) or damage; however, it is important to get checked as these symptoms may also indicate testicular cancer.

Testicular cancer is most commonly diagnosed in men in their 20s and 30s, peaking between the ages of 30 and 34 with 2,300 men being diagnosed in UK each year.

Many testicular cancers can be cured if treated early so it is important to check regularly and don't delay seeking GP advice.

## Mental health/stress

Research shows that men are less inclined to speak openly about their emotional wellbeing and it is thought that this may be due to societal and gender stereotypes and expectations.

It's becoming more commonly heard in recent times, but it really is 'OK not to be OK'. Men should feel safe to speak out and seek support and be confident that they won't be judged or perceived differently for doing so.

Approximately one in eight men in the UK are thought to have a common mental health condition such as depression, anxiety or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) (Mental Health Foundation) with over one third of men reporting having experienced mental health problems at some point in their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic and recent lockdowns have been particularly challenging and may have brought to the surface emotional and psychological symptoms for some.

Men are three times more likely to become alcohol addicted than women and reduced mental health can be a trigger for unhealthy behaviours; men are more likely to use potentially harmful coping mechanisms, which could potentially lead to addiction.



Common symptoms of reduced mental health in men can include:

- Low mood and increased anxiety
- Irritability with feelings of anger
  - Increased risk taking and aggression
  - Reduced motivation
  - Poor sleep, fatigue/lethargy
  - Tearfulness
  - Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and helplessness.
  - Feelings of guilt, shame, and low self esteem.
  - Apathy – no longer getting enjoyment out of or losing interest in things you ordinarily enjoy.
  - Thoughts of suicide or needing to escape.

Men are at a higher risk of suicide than women with approximately 75% of those who die by suicide in the UK being male. Men aged between 40 and 49 appear to be at greatest risk, although the incidence of younger people attempting suicide and reporting feeling suicidal has increased recently across both genders. Suicide is biggest killer of men under the age of 45 in the UK.

### **Mental health is just as important as physical health.**

Talking is not always easy and data suggests that fewer men than women access mental health support. However, with the increased risk of suicide and other harmful behaviours such as addiction, it's important to speak out and seek support if needed.

If you recognise that you are experiencing symptoms related to your mental health, speak to your GP as they may be able to help. It can also be beneficial to explain how you're feeling to family and close friends so that they can offer support.

Additionally, lifestyle factors such as maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in physical activity, spending time outdoors, practising good sleep hygiene, ensuring a good work/life balance and practising techniques such as mindfulness and relaxation can be of great benefit.

As well as looking out for ourselves, it's also important that we look out for each other. If you suspect a friend or colleague may be struggling, offer a listening ear, encourage them to talk and let them know that help is available and that they are not alone.

Starting a conversation with somebody about their mental health can be really helpful; it may be the first time somebody has asked, and it may offer a huge sense of relief to acknowledge that this is how they are feeling.



Some helpful tips for starting such conversations include:

- Don't worry too much about what to say – the important thing is to listen and ask open questions such as 'how does that feel?'
- You don't have to come up with solutions – you don't need to pretend you know how they are feeling or have all the answers
- Don't judge or criticise, e.g. if they have begun to engage in unhealthy behaviours such as increased alcohol consumption or drug use, they may already be aware and pointing it out may make them close down
- Do ask openly about thoughts of suicide – a common misconception is that this will give the individual ideas; however, asking questions such as 'are you having thoughts about ending your life' can help the individual open up
- Do reassure them that the feelings won't last for ever and there is support available.

If you feel that an individual is in immediate danger, e.g. if they tell you they have a plan or intention to act on thoughts of suicide, don't leave them alone. Try to remove any means of suicide from the immediate environment and seek further support – perhaps contact their GP on their behalf, call 999 or accompany them to A&E and stay with them until they are seen.

Hearing that a friend, family member or colleague is feeling suicidal can be difficult so make sure you also seek support for yourself if needed.

### **General wellbeing**

Your GP is your first port of call regarding your health; however, pharmacists are ideally placed for providing advice regarding minor ailments.

**Smoking cessation:** we all know that stopping smoking can help improve our health and there is a lot of support available to help you quit, e.g. apps, stop-smoking aids and more formal services such as smoking cessation. The health benefits of stopping smoking begin almost immediately, so if you are a smoker and wanting to quit, speak to your GP or local pharmacist about the support available in your local area.

**Alcohol:** the recommended weekly alcohol intake is 14 units per week. This is the equivalent to six pints of average strength lager/beer, six medium glasses of average strength wine, or six double shots of spirit per week spread over three or more days.

Drinking above the recommended limits on a regular basis increases the risk of short-term health risks, such as injury and accidents, reduced energy and poor lifestyle choices relating to diet and exercise.

It also increases the risk of long-term health risks such as liver damage, weight gain, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, mental health problems, diabetes and gout.

There are many simple ways to cut down alcohol intake, e.g.

- Being aware (keep track and know your units)
- Alternating between alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks
- Drinking only with meals
- Ensuring drink-free days each week.

If you have concerns regarding your alcohol intake, speak to your GP for further support.

**Weight:** nearly seven out of every ten men in the UK are considered obese. Being overweight increases the risk of many health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and certain types of cancer; it is also linked to decreased fertility.

Approximately one in ten men have diabetes and, although the reasons are not clear, men are more likely to experience diabetic complications such as foot ulcers; they are also more likely to die from diabetic complications.

To reduce your risk of developing diabetes, be mindful of the following diet and exercise advice...

- **Diet:** evidence suggests that men's diet within the UK does not, on average, meet the recommended dietary guidelines; they are eating too little fresh fruit and vegetables and too much red/processed meat, salt and saturated fats
- Aim for approximately 2,500 calories per day depending on dietary need and calories burned
- Eat a balanced and varied diet with plenty of fibre, fish, fruit and veg, and limit your intake of red and processed meat, saturated fat, and salt.

- **Exercise:** increasing activity levels can help improve your general health and wellbeing by reducing the risk of chronic diseases, improving sleep quality, supporting stress management, helping weight maintenance, and improving overall life quality
- Guidelines suggest we should aim to complete 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week (75 minutes if vigorous)
- Breaking this up into smaller chunks over the week (such as 30 minutes a day Monday to Friday) and varying the type of exercise you do may help reduce monotony. This can result in it being more sustainable, whilst making it more manageable to fit into a busy lifestyle.

## Support

- **Samaritans:** Free support for anybody in distress; available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can be contacted via telephone on 116 123 or via email on [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)
- **CALM** (Campaign Against Living Miserably): free support available 5pm – midnight, 365 days a year. They can be contacted on 0800 58 58 58. Calm also offers support for those affected by suicide and provides an information booklet on this subject which can be accessed via <https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/support-after-suicide/>



- **Men's Health Forum:** offers a variety of support and advice for men regarding a number of different aspects of health: <https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/>



- **Movember:** further information and advice regarding common men's health issues <https://uk.movember.com/mens-health/mental-health>

