

Guys and Doctors: What's the Disconnect?

As I hung up the phone, I wondered: How many times have I had this conversation with my grown sons: “You have health insurance. Why not get an annual check-up?” Or, “You still have that pain in your stomach? What did the doctor say?”

Oh, that’s right, *real men* don’t go to the doctor! Once again, I’m thinking like a woman, or worse yet, a mom.

It’s not just me. Other moms, wives and sisters have anecdotal evidence of their own. If you need more, consider a 2019 survey showing that 72 percent of the 1,174 male participants would rather do household chores than go to the doctor.

“Many men think they have to be strong. They’re ashamed to ask for help or don’t want to recognize certain health problems,” says Dr. Jacobo Wajner, an internist with the University of Miami Health System.

Dr. E. Robert Schwartz, a family medicine doctor with UHealth, agrees. “It’s very common in my own practice. Many men think they’re impervious to illness. Just this week, a couple came in. Both had appointments that day. The wife said there was no way her husband would have come in on his own.”

The Comfort of the Cave

To be fair, men don’t deserve all the blame. Cultural expectations around masculinity still prevail: suck it up, that ache will go away on its own, etc. Many of the survey respondents said they were told as children that men don’t complain about health issues.

(If you think the “tough guy” image isn’t alive and well in the 21st century, just watch the latest *Bourne* trailer.)

The situation is worse for Latino men. They are more likely to be sick or suffer from chronic diseases than the average American, but are less likely to seek treatment. Many Latino men don’t seek care unless their condition is serious.

When stressed, men are more likely to isolate themselves, instead of seeking support. That’s a problem. Studies show that stress causes a host of physical ailments, from heart disease to prostate cancer. It’s also the most common cause of erectile dysfunction (ED). In fact, stress can cause ED in men of *any* age.

Now that I have your attention . . .

Building Trust

According to the survey, 20 percent of the respondents admitted to being less than honest with their doctor when they did seek care. In men’s defense, Dr. Wajner says it takes time to build trust in your doctor. “I don’t expect patients, male or female, to be totally open on the first visit.”

Trust is the cornerstone of any relationship. That’s why Dr. Schwartz recommends continuity over convenience. He encourages men to establish a relationship with a primary care doctor who takes the time to ask questions and listen. Having a regular doctor comes in handy when health issues crop up. Many doctors now communicate with patients through text or email, so it can take less time to get answers.

Having a primary doctor is key, but don’t overlook other opportunities to advocate for your health. Take advantage of free workplace and public health screenings during your lunch hour. Check out UHealth’s Shop Docs who are taking screenings

directly to the guys at local Miami barbershops. UHealth Clinics at Walgreens are helpful after doctor's office hours and on weekends.

Taking Action

So, guys, you know modern medicine is useful when you've sliced off your finger with the band saw. Why is it worth going when you're feeling fine? Even if you've got a lingering pain in your gut, it's just a result of your burrito obsession, right?

You might want to consider this advice from Dr. Schwartz. "Taking direct action and practicing prevention is better than waiting." Even as he shares this, Dr. Schwartz acknowledges that, "Most men aren't interested in prevention."

The survey backs up his point. It found that 82 percent of men "try to stay healthy to live longer for friends and family who rely on them, yet only 50 percent engage in preventative care."

We're not talking about running to the doctor for every little ache and pain. Dr. Wajner says that lack of time often keeps men out of the doctor's office.

One solution is to prioritize health screenings that make or break your longevity. Men with risk factors can ask their doctor if earlier or more frequent screenings are necessary. These include smoking, obesity, or guys who have a family history of certain diseases.

The list below outlines essential health screenings.

Young men:

- Flu shots and meningococcal vaccine
- Gardasil vaccine to prevent HPV

- Testicular cancer screenings
- Skin cancer screenings (if you work outdoors)
- Cancer screenings and cessation counseling if you use tobacco products

Middle-age men:

- Colonoscopy at age 50+ (earlier if a family history of polyps or colon cancer)
- Prostate cancer screening based on an individual assessment by the doctor
- Hemoglobin A1C blood test for diabetes
- Glaucoma screening, starting in your late 40s to early 50s
- Lipid profile to measure total cholesterol level
- Skin cancer screenings
- Cancer screenings and cessation counseling if you use tobacco products
- HPV vaccine up to age 45
- Herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine after age 50
- One-time hepatitis C screening

Senior men:

- Same as for middle-aged men
- Flu shots and pneumococcal vaccine

Dr. Wajner notes that the tetanus vaccine is recommended every 10 years.

The Buddy System

Ladies, want your man to be proactive about his health?

“Don’t nag – that sets up a pattern of resistance. Use encouragement instead. If you’ve had a good experience at the doctor, share it. Guide men to wellness information on the Internet. Remind them that simple blood and urine tests give

doctors good information,” Dr. Schwartz says.

A Strong Foundation

Unfortunately, bacon and beer are not a complete food group, but there *is* good news for guys. A little effort goes a long way in minimizing trips to the doctor.

“An active lifestyle and healthy eating are the foundation of good health,” says Dr. Wajner. As you might expect, Dr. Schwartz echoes this sentiment. “I’m a big proponent of exercise and nutrition.”

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LEARN MORE ABOUT MEN'S HEALTH:

- Dad bod is not inevitable (even if you are not all that athletic)
- Yes, men can get yeast infections too.
- A closer look at male fertility treatment
- How companionship could save a life
- What do Ryan Reynolds, the Rock, and Brad Pitt have in common? (Yeah, but besides that.)