

Health Checkups: You Need Them, Guys

Regular health checkups can catch little things before they become big problems.

Hey, guys! You really should get them. But, truth is, most don't.

Most of us treat our cars better than our bodies.

We take our car to the shop regularly. We get our oil changed, rotate our tires. And – insert manly chortle here – *everybody* knows you don't skip a 10,000- or 20,000-mile checkup. Because we know that if you do, things break down. Little problems can become big problems.

But our bodies?

Fit and healthy - not the same thing



Men tend to think that as long as things seem to be working right, they *are* working right. And that's not necessarily true, says Dr. Bruce Kava, the director of men's health at the University of Miami Health System and the Miami/Fort Lauderdale

area chief of urology for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

“They may go to the gym. They may work out. But that person is not necessarily healthy,” he says. “Although they have a nice physique, they’ve done their bodybuilding, they may run on the treadmill or work some of the muscles, but that doesn’t make for a healthy person necessarily.”

Women are different. Women learn early in life to see a gynecologist for regular exams, to go in for mammograms periodically. Not men.

Men, he says, tend to skip regular checkups. (You can see him talk about it [here](#).)

“Men just don’t attend screenings. They don’t seek medical attention as early as women do,” Dr. Kava says. “Men wait. There’s no male gynecologist that sees men between the ages of 20 and 50 and that timeframe is a period of time when men do a lot of damage to their bodies.”

By the time most men get checkups, to use that car maintenance metaphor again, an oil change has turned into major engine trouble. A 15-minute job has turned into two weeks in the shop getting a new set of valves.

Or worse.

“By the time they come to us later on — in their fifties or sixties — they’re usually coming for some issue. Like erectile dysfunction, voiding complaints. Because by then the prostate has grown and they’re starting to see symptoms,” says Dr. Kava. “But all the damage they’ve done that they’ve done to their cardiovascular system — between the obesity, cigarette smoking, poor lifestyle choices — that’s beyond when we can rectify some of the problems that could have been identified earlier.”

Plan your pit stops

The American Urological Society and Men's Health Network both put out rough timetables for having your doctor check under the hood based on your age — [here](#) and [here](#).

But those are just guidelines, says Dr. Kava. A race car driver works with his pit crew to decide when to pull in. A good mechanic asks about your driving habits. You should talk with your doctor to figure out what's best for you.

"The healthier approach is a shared decisional approach between the physician and the patient," says Dr. Kava. "The physician brings to the patient the education, the medical understanding. The patient brings his values and his understanding of the concepts, what he would ultimately wish to do."

That doesn't mean checkups are the only time you should see your doctor. In between, you should keep an eye out for changes. Those are like the warning lights in your car. You know, sudden, inexplicable weight loss or an odd mole. The most important might be the one that comes on when you're having trouble, um, getting in gear.

"Several studies have shown that patients who have had heart attacks and major cardiovascular events," he says, "as a precursor to that they had been complaining about erectile dysfunction."

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