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5 Reasons Men Shouldn't Blow Off Going to the Doctor



By Bill Phillips and the Editors of Men's Health
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Men's Health

by Bill Phillips and the Editors of Men's Health

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You probably saw the headline last week: "Half of Men Don't Go to the Doctor." The story was based on a survey that found 45 percent of men between ages 18 and 50 don't have a primary care physician, and 40 percent of men in their 40s have never even had their cholesterol tested.

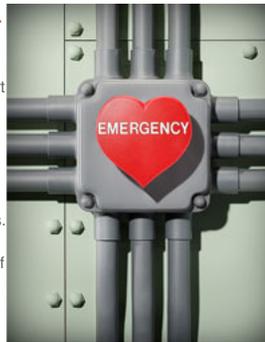
Other research over the past few years backs this up. In fact, an American Academy of Family Physicians survey found that *more than* half of men—55 percent—hadn't seen their M.D. in the previous year. What gives?

Simple. "Men are babies," says T.E. Holt, M.D., Ph.D., a *Men's Health* contributing editor and practicing physician with the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. "Men notoriously avoid doctors, especially men between the ages of 20 and 40. These are the same years in which men are twice as likely as women to die."

What are men afraid of? What their physicians will find, of course. But this is far scarier: Avoiding your annual checkup could be a fatal mistake. Here are 5 killer reasons to schedule your doctor's appointment today.

Schedule a Doctor's Appointment Because . . . Your heart may be hiding something

Nearly 800,000 Americans will have a first heart attack this year, according to the American Heart Association. For more than a third of them, the first symptom will be death. But half of all victims could have seen the attack coming, especially with the help of their doctors.



The first two symptoms are usually shortness of breath during light activity, or slight chest pain when exercising, says Michael Blaha, M.D., M.P.H., a cardiologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital. This is why most doctors ask about your fitness regimen, whether you've been feeling any discomfort (like "muscle strain" or "heartburn") lately, and if you're able to do as much as you used to. The fact is, most men don't recognize the symptoms of heart disease.

"It only clicks afterward," Dr. Blaha says. "It's common, after a heart attack, for the person to say they've been short of breath or more fatigued than usual."

Sometimes, these symptoms last for years before the person has a heart attack. "There's often plenty of time to correct the problem," says Dr. Blaha, "through medication or exercise." You just need to be man enough to start the conversation with your doctor. Are you?

Schedule a Doctor's Appointment Because . . . Your blood sugar may be running rampant

Although not an infectious disease, diabetes seems to be spreading like one. Since 1980, its prevalence in the United States has risen by 47 percent, a trend that's expected to accelerate more in the next decade. Nearly half of American men today either have the condition or are on the verge of developing it, according to a new

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report from the National Institutes of Health. More than a third of them don't even know it.

Everyone in America should be tested for diabetes. (It's a simple pin-prick test. No excuses.) Why? There's just too much at stake, says David Kendall, M.D., American Diabetes Association chief scientific and medical officer. Consider:

- Having diabetes doubles your chances of dying at any age compared with a person who's diabetes-free.
- Diabetes is the primary cause of cardiovascular disease in the United States, slashing a man's life span by an average of 13 years. According to a recent study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, if you're diagnosed with diabetes before age 60, your risk of heart attack increases 2.5 times.
- The farther along the disease progresses before diagnosis, the greater your likelihood of eye problems (often resulting in blindness), kidney problems (often resulting in dialysis), and trouble healing (often resulting in amputation).
- Undiagnosed diabetes also puts you at higher risk of certain types of cancer.

Here's the good news: When caught early enough, the progression of diabetes can be slowed or even stopped through simple lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise, says Keith Berkowitz, M.D., founder and medical director of the Center for Balanced Health in New York City. (In fact, one maverick doctor has reversed the progression of diabetes in some patients—[check out The Cure for Diabetes.](#))

Diabetes screening should start no later than age 45, says Dr. Kendall. For those at higher risk—because they have high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, or a family history—screening should begin immediately.

Schedule a Doctor's Appointment Because . . .

The second-deadliest cancer is almost entirely preventable

More than 150,000 Americans are diagnosed with colon cancer every year, and 53,000 die annually from the disease. But more than 60 percent of all cases could easily be caught earlier, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Why is this important? Colon cancer is 90 percent curable when caught early. The disease starts when a few abnormal cells in the colon develop into polyps. Then, 10 to 15 years later, those polyps turn malignant and often spread to other parts of the body. But, through regular screening, doctors can find and remove the polyps while they're still harmless.

"You can't wait for symptoms," says David Johnson M.D., chief of gastroenterology at Eastern Virginia Medical School. "Changing bowel habits, bleeding, and abdominal pain come only in the late stages of this cancer. They're potentially very ominous."

Bonus Tip: For the latest men's health news, along with tips that can improve your life instantly, [check out our new Health Headlines blog!](#)

Schedule a Doctor's Appointment Because . . . Your abs may be covering an aneurysm

More than 30,000 Americans die of aneurysms each year—it's the 14th most common cause of death in this country. When you hear the word, you probably think of a rupture of an artery in the brain. But abdominal aortic aneurysms are far more common than you think, especially in older men. In fact, according to a study published in the *Annals of Vascular Medicine*, 5 percent of men ages 65 and older will eventually have one.

Your chances of surviving an aortic aneurysm are small: just 6 to 21 percent, depending on the location. "Only 1 of 20 patients has any pain like a rumbling of a volcano before the actual tearing occurs," says John Elefteriades, M.D., chief of cardiac surgery at Yale Medical School. "That's why it's important to do everything we can to detect these aneurysms.

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"Aneurysms in the belly can be felt on physical exam," he goes on. "But aneurysms in the chest can't be felt because of the ribcage." This is why your doctor will listen for a heart murmur, an early symptom of an aneurysm in the making.

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If you have a family history of the disease, it's important to tell your doctor. Chances are, he or she will order a chest screening. Don't be afraid—you just have to lay there!

Schedule a Doctor's Appointment Because . . .

. . . That may not be a mole

Skin cancer attacks a disproportionate number of men. In fact, of the more than 3.5 million new skin cancer cases in America each year, more than two-thirds occur in men.



The deadliest form of the disease is melanoma,

a cancer of the skin's pigment-producing cells that kills almost 8,000 people each year. One in 39 men (versus 1 in 58 women) will eventually develop melanoma, but don't fret. "Early detection can be difficult with other organs in the body, but not so with the skin," says Adnan Nasir, M.D., a clinical professor of dermatology at the University of North Carolina.

"When melanoma first develops, it's only on the surface of the skin, making it easy to remove and cure," says Daniel Kaplan, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of dermatology at University of Minnesota. "The longer it goes untreated, however, the more it spreads. That makes the chances of survival much slimmer."

In most cases, you have up to a year to find a melanoma before it will hurt you, which is why dermatologists recommend annual exams. They also advise monthly self-exams. Ask your girlfriend or wife to help, and then return the favor.

This, men, actually is scary: Despite recent medical advances, the 5-year survival rate for stage IV melanoma is only 15 percent. And if you've had just five—that's right, only five—moderate sunburns in your lifetime, your risk of developing the malignant melanoma is double.

Still afraid to call your doctor now? I thought not.

Bonus Tip: Since our launch in 1988, *Men's Health* has been improving the health—and the lives—of men, one tip at a time. Want to see what you missed? Check out our [20 Greatest Health Tips Ever!](#)

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