

# HOW TO GET YOUR MAN HEALTHY

BY ADAM BIBLE

**T**he man in your life isn't telling you something. Maybe it's that he hasn't been to a doctor for a physical since he played football in high school. It could be that he has a persistent throbbing in the left side of his chest. Perhaps an ache in his groin that he hoped would just fade away hasn't—it's gotten worse.

Men are notorious procrastinators, obfuscators, and denialists when it comes to their health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), twice as many men as women have no regular source of health care. Also illuminating is a recent survey of over 1,000 men, conducted for the American Association of Family Physicians (AAFP) by Harris Interactive, which discovered that 36 percent would not go visit a doctor unless they were extremely sick, and

more than half of men haven't even been to see their primary care physician within the past year. Another survey of over 500 men, by *Esquire* magazine, showed that half of men ages 18 to 50 don't even have a primary physician. All of these pathetic stats help illustrate why men don't live very long—even though people in the U.S. live longer than ever before; according to the CDC, the average man's lifespan is more than 5 years shorter than a woman's.

You've probably already told your husband or boyfriend that he should go to the doctor regularly. His most likely responses were a shrug paired with a mumbled "OK," or an indignant "I'll get to it!" followed by some mild sulking. If that sounds like your man, don't despair, as there are some subtle steps that you can follow to make your man a healthy man.

## Education is Key

“Any attempt to help a man adopt healthy habits can run the risk of undermining his sense of manhood,” says Will Courtenay, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., author of *Dying to Be Men: Psycho-social, Environmental, and Biobehavioral Directions in Promoting the Health of Men and Boys* (Routledge, 2011). The typical American male has been raised to be a “real” man, which usually entails engaging in risky behavior as a way to earn respect and to prove manliness. “Dismissing their health needs is one way that men prove that they are men,” says Courtenay.

The whole key to getting your man healthy is, as silly as it sounds, to help them help themselves. It’s really that simple—getting there, though, is the challenge. You can start by helping them get educated,

says Courtenay. The first step is to give him easy access to knowledge: leave articles that you think might interest him laying around; when you are watching TV together, check out some health-related TV shows; or get him a subscription to a magazine like *Men’s Health*. If he’s more interested in hard data, there are numerous newsletters published by leading universities and hospitals like Harvard and Johns Hopkins. “The key is high information with low pressure. Once he starts to think about changing, the chances of him actually changing are doubled,” Courtenay says.

## Change the Frame

When you decide to sit down and talk about his health, “you need to be thinking about changing the frame of the conversation,” says Eli Karam,

Ph.D., L.M.F.T., president-elect of the Kentucky Association for Marriage and Family Therapy and assistant professor at the University of Louisville. Men often get stuck around the idea that going to the doctor is purely a pathological measure—they’re not stepping through the door of a doctor’s office unless a limb is falling off. “When a spouse decides to talk to their man, they should frame it as a preventative thing,” says Karam. “Help them understand that it isn’t necessarily about going just when you are sick.” Let them know that seeing a physician regularly should be built into a routine, like paying taxes or taking your child to the doctor.

Karam calls the next technique the “softened start up.” It’s all about the approach. Men know that your intentions are good and that you just

## Back-to-Basics Health Guide

Your man doesn’t need a battery of tests every year to stay healthy says Rick Kellerman, M.D. professor and chair at the department of family and community medicine at the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita.

“A smattering of testing has never been shown to be effective for early detection of disease,” he says. “Getting lots of tests really doesn’t matter that much, as they could set doctors off on the wrong direction, and too many [tests] can waste time and money—and they often don’t even help.” It’s better to make sure that the man in your life has these three things in order: knowing his blood pressure, knowing his cholesterol levels, and keeping his weight under control.

Taking care of these three things is important, but what tends to be more crucial is having a trusted physician looking after all of your health care and advising you. “You need to have a family physician that knows you and your family history and can make individual recommendations for you,” Kellerman says. A family doctor is able to tailor your treatment and offer preventative medicine—you might only need to go in for check-ups every two years if your doc thinks you are healthy enough, or if your risk factors are high, he might need to see you every month.

Though, as your man ages, there is one test that is universally recommended, Kellerman says. He should get a colon cancer screening at age 50—after skin cancers, colon cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the U.S., according to the American Cancer Society. The tests are usually either a colonoscopy or an inexpensive take-home fecal blood test, says Kellerman.

Prostate exams are also important, but there are some caveats that your man should be aware of: Prostate cancer is oftentimes very slow growing and “therapy has many potential complications (urinary incontinence, impotence, bleeding, even death); physicians and patients must balance the risk and benefits of screening.” Have him sit down with his doctor and discuss the risks and benefits of prostate cancer treatment. “What might be right for one patient may not be right for another based on the patient’s preferences, age, life goals, risk factors, etc.,” says Kellerman.

Whatever your man’s age or risk factors, get him to a doctor, and set up a regular schedule with the same doctor. Make it a habit he can’t break, and your long healthy life together will be the only reward you’ll need.

# Eat Out, Eat Healthy



**AT THE RESTAURANT** Going out to eat, whether you're using plastic plates or silver spoons, can be tough on your weight—research from Tufts University shows that the more you eat out, the more likely you are to be fat, and the average restaurant entrée, appetizer, and dessert each contain about 1,000 calories, according to a 2009 survey from the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

To put that in context, the US government's 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends between 2,000 to 3,000 calories per day for men and for women the range is from 1,600 to 2,400 calories daily. Your whole daily caloric intake can almost be taken down by one meal at a restaurant!

Thankfully, men have women by their side, and *they* have been shown to be more conscious about what they put on their plate and in their stomachs when eating out. A 2010 study in the journal *Preventing Chronic Disease* showed that when women went to restaurants, they were more likely to practice good strategies for managing their caloric intake, like ordering salad dressing on the side or taking half of the meal home.

We have Jim White, RD, an American Dietetic Association (ADA) spokesperson and owner of Jim White Fitness and Nutrition Studios in Virginia Beach, Va., to help us sort out what to do when eating out. Try his strategies to limit your calories and practice safe eating:

- » Try sharing an entrée—doing this can cut your calories in half.
- » If your spouse doesn't want to share an entrée, divide it in half then take the rest home when you leave.
- » Starches can get you in trouble. Ask to double the vegetables and hold the potatoes or French fries.
- » Drink a couple of glasses of water before you go out to curb your appetite.
- » Don't go out to eat while famished.
- » Bread can be a killer. Ask them to keep the bread in the kitchen.

**BURGERS AND BEERS** When going out to a ballgame or BBQ, there will be many tasty, unhealthy treats to tempt your man. If he's been good and eating healthy, it's OK to let him splurge as long as he practices moderation. If he needs some guidance, check out what Jim White has to say.

If you are heading out to a friend's BBQ, White says your man can still stay healthy while being manly by bringing burgers made with 96-percent lean ground beef. If he's not too afraid of being seen without a big piece of cow on his plate, White says, "Try 93-percent lean ground turkey or even shish kebobs made with shrimp and veggies." Make sure to put those burgers on a whole-wheat bun with low-cal condiments like olive oil mayo and dill pickles.

At the ballgame, stick with non-greasy fare: "Peanuts or popcorn are a great option," says White. A cold beer goes perfect with a baseball game and peanuts, but be sure to persuade him to get light beer when he hits the beer line. If they have healthier choices like grilled chicken or wraps, go with those. If he's gotta have a dog, take it out of the bun and have it that way.

# Keep Him Limber, Keep Him Fit

You know the scene: your man took off on Saturday morning, pumped and ready to kick some butt on the field. He couldn't wait to try out some new gear and impress his friends with some "killer" moves. He came back limping and bruised.

Nick Tumminello, CPT, owner of Performance University in Baltimore, Md., offers these three easy exercises to keep the man in your life strong and limber. Instead of static stretching before playing a game, tell your man to do one round of each of these before hitting the field and "they'll be ready to rumble," says Tumminello. As a workout though, perform the following exercise as a circuit, with 20 reps of each for three rounds, one after another. Do it for time—see how fast you can get through it—and rest as needed while keeping good form.

## ZOMBIE SQUAT

Works lower body and hips: 15 to 20 reps

- » **Hold** your hands out in front of you (this creates a counterbalance allowing you to get a deeper and straighter squat).
- » **Turn** your toes out slightly, at a 15-degree angle, and plant your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart.
- » **Bend** your knees and drop down into a squat. Keep your heels flat. Try to go as deep as you possibly can, while using your hip muscles to drive your knees outward.
- » **Stand** up.

## T-ROLL PUSHUP

Upper body mobility and strength, core strength:  
6 reps per side

- » **Perform** a pushup.
  - » **Return** to the starting position, roll to one side onto the outside of your foot while keeping one hand on the ground.
  - » **Lift** your other arm into the air while trying to make your body into a perfect "T."
  - » **Feel** the stretching in your chest by making sure your outstretched arm is slightly behind you
  - » **Repeat** the exercise on the other side of your body.
- \* If you can't do a pushup, leave it out and just do the T-Roll

## SINGLE LEG REACH AND TOUCH

Flexibility of hamstrings, enhances balance: 10 to 20 reps per side

- » **Balance** on your right leg and raise your left hand up like you are doing the pledge of allegiance.
- » **Bend** down at the hips, knees, and ankles. Bring your hand down, touch your right toe, then come back up to resume the pledge-of-allegiance position and stand tall.
- » **Do** all reps on one side before switching to the other side, and try not to put the non-weight bearing foot down throughout the exercise.

want to see them healthy and around to enjoy your life together, but when the approach seems probing and confrontational, they will often quickly rebel against the idea or take it as an insult.

When it's time to talk to them, you can employ the soft start up by playing on their inherent manliness: Portray yourself as the weak one, the one who needs help. Framing the conversation in terms of "I'm really scared about your health" versus "You need to go now" can yield much more positive results. "Telling them that you need them to go because it would make you feel much better, or that they are such a good provider and that you need them to be around," says Karam, "can really play on their own need to feel like the protector and an important part of your life."

A 2009 study of over 1,000 middle-aged men found that men with more traditional beliefs of masculinity, or "macho" men, were almost half as likely to go to the doctor for preventative care. But, within those men surveyed, the lower-status, blue-collar workers were the exception. Their families depend on them to provide food and shelter, and the men depend on their bodies while working. Courtenay suggests using men's desire to compete and perform well by speaking to them about how regular check-ups will allow them to be able to do things much better—their job, playing golf, hunting or fishing, or playing with their kids or grandkids. "They will be able to do it better if their body is well maintained—the same way they would get better mileage out of a car that is well maintained," Courtenay says.

## Find the Problem

Another approach that can also work is by attacking the issue from a monetary angle. "I had one tough guy in a therapy session who wouldn't even take an aspirin," Karam says. "I asked him, 'Why spend all of this money on health care each year, if you don't

even take advantage of it?' He was a thrifty guy and that was the tipping point for him."

Others may be scared to go. "Your man could've had a bad experience with a doctor as a kid," Karam says. Others may have formed early impressions about what it is to be a man by watching a dad who was a 'suck-it-up-and-take-the-pain' type of guy—ask them about their family life and try to find out why they are reluctant to go.


You can ask your man what would help motivate him to go. Perhaps he'd like you to come along. "Why not go with him next time?" Karam says. Or maybe find out what the perfect doctor for them would be. Would a younger or older doc make them more comfortable? Maybe he would feel better going to a female physician? "You need to ask these type of things to understand what it is that is holding him back," Karam says.

### Don't Give Up

Finally, even if all of your preparation and consideration isn't quite working, don't stop trying. "It is important not to nag, but it is also important not to give up on them," Courtenay says. "Keep listening for any inclination to change their offer. Maybe they'll mention something like, 'I've been worried about my weight.' That's an inroad into starting the conversation again."

Remember, too, that men are actually at a slight disadvantage—women have been hardwired to go to the doctor since puberty. Gynecological exams become a routine part of life for women, and anyone who has been pregnant will have had her fair share of poking and prodding and testing. "Men don't have this preventative maintenance built-in," says Karam. "It's not until mid-life that they need to start going regularly."

Also consider the consequences of not talking to your man about his health and persuading him to make regular visits to the doctor. Besides the specter of an early death, resentment can build up if he is diagnosed with something scary but preventable. "I'll get clients that neglected these issues and, when something does happen, the couple is scared and resentment builds up in the other partner," Karam says. "They think: 'You didn't care enough about me to take care of this.'" If you take the time to tend to the man in your life, your relationship will improve.

Be patient with your man. It's taken him a lifetime to learn his bad habits, and it will take some time to unlearn them. Your love and persistence will pay off when you end up living longer together. 



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