



## **Men's Health**

A healthy lifestyle is important to everyone. A good diet and regular exercise are vital. Some diseases like heart disease, diabetes and asthma affect men and women but men also have their own specific group of health problems like prostate and testicular diseases. This factsheet provides information on health issues that are most relevant to men.

### **Heart disease**

This is still the leading cause of death in men in the UK. This may be due to hereditary factors but also family members tend to have similar lifestyles. There are many risk factors for heart disease including smoking, obesity and lack of exercise. These factors can be altered to reduce your risk of heart disease or prevent further problems if you already have problems. Stopping smoking is very important, together with a healthy diet, maintaining an ideal body weight, taking regular exercise and controlling your blood pressure and stress levels. If you are worried about your risk of heart disease seek advice from your GP as they can calculate your risk and advise you on ways of reducing your risk.

### **High blood pressure (hypertension)**

This can increase your risk of suffering from heart attacks, strokes or kidney failure. If you have a family history of heart disease or high blood pressure you should get your doctor or nurse to check yours. They will advise you how frequently you should have your BP checked in the future. If you are over 40 years old it is a good idea to have your blood pressure checked every few years. If your blood pressure is high, your doctor may recommend medication to bring it back to normal. You can sometimes avoid starting BP medication by reducing weight (if you are overweight), reducing stress, reducing excessive salt, taking regular exercise and stopping smoking.

### **A healthy lifestyle**

Eating correctly

A healthy diet means choosing a variety of foods every day from the five main food groups:

- breads and cereals
- fruits and vegetables
- milk and dairy foods
- meat, fish and alternatives, such as beans or lentils
- fat and sugar

Although you should not cut out fat completely from your diet, try to limit fat to no more than 30% of your daily calorie intake. Use butter, margarine and oils sparingly – a scrape or a smear is sufficient. Cutting back on calories from fat leaves room to eat healthier foods, such as whole-grains, fruits and vegetables.

### **Regularly exercise**

30 minutes of exercise that increases your pulse rate on 5 or more days a week will decrease your risk of ill health . Brisk walking is ideal. It is always important to build up an exercise programme. Erratic episodes of strenuous exercise can cause health problems.

### **Monitor alcohol intake**

1-2 units of alcohol daily are thought to be beneficial to health. However excess alcohol can cause a variety of health problems including heart disease and erectile dysfunction. It is important to stick within the guide of up to 21 units of alcohol a week for men.

### **Coping with stress**

Finding time to relax is important. If you feel stressed it is important to take time away from the situations that are causing the stress .Take steps to reduce the stress in your life and try to change the way you respond to it. Consider relaxation techniques, such as meditation or yoga, take up a regular sport or hobby and pace yourself by tackling one task at a time, setting time aside to relax.

### **Diseases of the Prostate**

The prostate is a gland located between your bladder and urethra (the tube that takes urine from the bladder to the end of your penis). The prostate produces thick, white fluid called semen that mixes with sperm when it is ejaculated.

### **Enlarged prostate**

The prostate often enlarges when men reach their mid- 40s. When it enlarges it can press on the bladder and narrow the urethra which can cause a number of symptoms. These are particularly common in men over 50 and include:

- passing urine frequently during the day
- getting up at night at least twice on a regular basis to pass urine
- needing to strain to pass urine
- less powerful flow of urine
- feeling you have not completely emptied your bladder immediately after urinating
- dribbling from the urethra once you have finished urinating

An enlarged prostate may also lead to urine infections and very occasionally a complete urine blockage. If you pass blood from the urethra you must see your doctor. There are both medical and surgical treatments for enlarged prostates and if you have regular symptoms as listed above you should seek the advice of your doctor.

### **Prostate cancer**

Prostate cancer is rarely found in men less than 50 years of age, but becomes increasingly more common with age, although the causes are unclear. In prostate cancer, the tumour can press on the urethra and block the flow of urine, it may cause symptoms similar to the enlarged prostate. If you experience these symptoms you should consult your doctor. Your doctor will listen to your symptoms, perform a rectal examination and arrange blood tests. The most important blood test is a PSA (Prostate specific antigen test), which can be raised for several reasons, not just prostate cancer. If your doctor is concerned that there is a risk of prostate cancer he will arrange for you to see a Urologist for further tests and treatment if necessary.

Treatment depends on many factors, including your age, general health, stage of the cancer and side effects of treatment. Prostate cancer is often slow growing, so in some older men the best treatment may be 'watchful waiting' (no treatment). In other men, surgery, radiotherapy, hormone therapy or chemotherapy may be considered.

### **Diseases of the Testis**

Men should examine their testes regularly for lumps or ask their partner to do this for them. Men are often reluctant to seek advice and this delay can sometimes lead to a cancer having spread by the time a doctor is consulted. If you notice any swelling, lumps or pain in your testes you must consult your doctor. Cancer of the testis usually causes a painless lump, however any lump requires a prompt medical opinion.

### **Torsion of the testis**

Severe pain and swelling of the testis occurs if the spermatic cord is twisted (torsion). The pain develops quickly, and may also occur in the abdomen, and the scrotal skin may discolour. Unless testicular torsion is treated within a few hours, there may be permanent damage. Spontaneous untwisting sometimes occurs, but treatment is usually by surgery. Torsion of the testis usually occurs in puberty. If you think you or a family member has this you must seek a medical opinion as soon as possible.

### **Inflammation of the testis (orchitis)**

Swelling and severe pain in the testis along with high fever may be due to 'orchitis', which may develop in some men who catch mumps. Orchitis begins to fade after three to seven days. Swelling of both the testis and its associated coiled tube (epididymis) is severely painful, but often the cause of the infection is not obvious. With both of these conditions you should seek a medical opinion as it may not be an infection but torsion.

### **Sexually transmitted infections (STI's)**

These are common particularly in men who have had several recent sexual partners. They do not always cause symptoms in men. Chlamydia, gonorrhoea, genital warts, Herpes and HIV are the most common diseases to affect men in the UK. "Safe sex" means using a latex condom whenever you have penetrative sex. This will reduce your risk of acquiring an infection. The condoms should be made of latex – condoms made of other materials will not protect you. Decreasing your number of sexual partners will decrease your risk of STI's. If you are worried about STI's or need more detailed advice on "safe sex" speak to your doctor or attend a confidential GUM clinic (genitourinary medicine clinic).

### **Erectile dysfunction**

This is when you are unable to achieve or maintain an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse on a regular basis. Alcohol, smoking and various medications can affect your ability to achieve an erection. Erectile dysfunction becomes more common with age. It is caused by a lack of blood flow to the penis. There are a range of treatments available which depend on the cause, for example, taking a tablet before sexual activity. There are other medical treatments, surgical options and specialist counselling if the problem has a psychological basis. You should see a doctor before taking medication as they are not suitable for everyone and if used incorrectly can cause serious side effects.