

GUMC HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE JUNE 2024

June is Men's Health Awareness Month. The month of June is known as the time many schools let out for the summer, and June 20, 21, or 22 (depending on the year) is the longest day of the year with the most daylight hours in the Northern Hemisphere. June also plays host to the ever-important national holidays of Father's Day and Juneteenth. It's also the middle of the year and the midpoint of the growing season between planting and harvesting. Men's health awareness is a movement to raise consciousness of the unique health challenges and risks that men face. It includes events aimed at promoting men's physical, mental and emotional well-being. Men's health awareness also encourages men to avoid risky actions, such as smoking, drinking and having casual sex, and to take steps to keep themselves safe and manage illnesses.

At every stage of life, men are encouraged to consider three equally important aspects of their health—physical health, mental health and social connection. Men's Health Week (June 15-21) and Men's Health Month raise awareness of how these aspects work together and remind men to take charge of their health. “When you look at the top 10 leading causes of death and stratify by gender, men lead in 9 of the 10 categories,” says Salvatore J. Giorgianni Jr., PharmD, a senior science adviser to Men's Health Network (MHN). “Even before the difficult scenario of COVID-19, men's suicide rates were four times higher than women's. The CDC believes a large reason for this is the increase in substance abuse across the board. Even more difficult to take is that the shift has moved from older men to middle-aged men. There is a tremendous fear among men's health experts that this will be exacerbated for quite some time. There are too many men dying from conditions that are manageable but by and large preventable.”

Mental Health Is Key for Men, Who May Be Socialized to Stay Silent

Dr. Giorgianni believes some of the difficulty men face when dealing with mental health arises because they have not developed the skills to talk about it. “These deep-seated issues start when you are a young boy,” he says. “You fall or something happens to you, and you're told to suck it up, act like a man. Men don't have a good reference book to talk about their emotional health or hurt. There's also the matter of stigma. It's a societal issue why men and boys can't talk about mental health, depending on what communities they're in, what stage of life, people surrounding them, their zip codes or ethnicities — there are a multitude of factors why boys and men are not encouraged to say things like ‘I'm really down,’ or ‘I feel awful.’ Guys have to learn that it's not unmanly to talk about their mental health. If they don't talk about it, they internalize it and it becomes very dangerous. It's not the type of thing where you can just say, ‘Hey, go get screened for depression.’ It doesn't work that way, unfortunately.”

A SILENT CRISIS IN MEN'S HEALTH IS SHORTENING THE LIFE SPANS OF FATHERS, HUSBANDS, BROTHERS AND SONS. The Washington Post, April 17, 2023 Men's health advocates say one of the biggest factors is a lack of infrastructure to support research specifically focused on men's health. For years, the Men's Health Network has lobbied for the creation of an Office of Men's Health, similar to the Office of Women's Health in Health and Human Services Department. Proposed legislation, however, has consistently failed to win support.

The physical aspect of men's health: Men 15-65 years of age are significantly less likely than women to seek preventive care services, and they are more likely to report not having a primary care provider. A good first step on the path toward improved health is to make a call and establish with a primary care provider (PCP). A PCP will review medical, surgical and family history and recommend age- and risk-appropriate health screenings.

Recommended screenings for young men (18-39): Men in this age range are encouraged to discuss the health concerns below with their doctors. These discussions can be part of a yearly annual wellness visit. While you may think you don't need some of these tests, establishing a base line can be useful for continued health

monitoring as you age, or as more acute health concerns arise. **Physical exam:** check blood pressure, screen for obesity and assess body composition (waist circumference). Testicular exam and testicular self-exam are important at this age. **Metabolic screening:** fasting blood sugar and fasting lipid profile based on risk and family history. Vaccines: influenza, COVID-19, Hepatitis A/B, HPV, Tdap and MMR should be considered. **STI screening:** HIV, Hepatitis B/C, syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia screening should be considered, and pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV (PreP) should be discussed. **Assessment of risky behaviors:** discuss any use of tobacco, alcohol, recreational drugs, anabolic steroids, as well as use of seatbelts and helmets and gun safety. **Family planning:** “pre-conception” counseling to educate men that adopting a healthy lifestyle—exercising, eating healthy foods, and avoiding substances—at an early age improves the chances of conceiving and having a healthy pregnancy and a healthy child.

Recommended screenings for adult men over 40. These screenings are similar to those recommended for younger men but start to look at health concerns that most often appear in middle age. **Physical exam:** check blood pressure, screen for obesity, measure body composition and consider prostate exam (in some cases). **Metabolic screening:** fasting blood sugar and fasting lipid profile and estimation of cardiovascular risk. **Vaccines:** influenza, covid-19, Hepatitis A/B, HPV (through age 45), Tdap and MMR. Shingles vaccine is recommended for adults over 50. **STI screening:** HIV, Hepatitis B/C, syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia screening should be considered, and pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV (PreP) should be discussed. **Cardiovascular screening:** based on risk and symptoms (may include stress testing or coronary artery calcium score). **Cancer screening:** based on family history and personal risks. May include prostate, colon and lung cancer screening as well as skin exam. Eye exam.

Recommended screenings for adult men over 65. Older men should continue to evaluate their health and make lifestyle changes based on conversations with their doctors to ensure they are able to live life to the fullest. **Physical exam:** blood pressure, height and weight, waist circumference and prostate exam. **Metabolic screening:** fasting blood sugar, fasting lipid profile, thyroid function (in some cases). **Vaccines:** influenza, covid-19, Hepatitis A/B, Tdap, Pneumovax/Prevnar and Shingles. **STI screening:** based on risk. **Cardiovascular screening:** abdominal ultrasound, coronary artery calcium score and stress testing based on risk and symptoms. **Cancer screening:** prostate, colon and lung as well as skin exam. **Osteoporosis:** screening should be considered in men over 70, men who lose height over time or have a low impact fracture. Fall risk assessment should be completed. Eye exam. The American Urology Association has published a Men’s Health Checklist with a detailed description of recommended health screenings for men of all ages.

Men’s Mental Health - Mental health is an important determinant of overall health and quality of life at every age. Although men are more likely to suffer “deaths of despair” including alcoholism, overdose and suicide, they are far less likely than women to seek out mental health services. Undiagnosed and untreated mood disorders in young men are associated with impaired learning, risk-taking behaviors, use of substances and violence. Adult men with chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease have worse outcomes when they also suffer from depression, and depression is associated with decreased longevity in older men.

Men should be aware of the symptoms of depression and anxiety and know when it’s time to seek help. Organizations like HeadsUpGuys, the National Black Men’s Health Network, Don’t Change Much and the Movember Foundation provide useful tips for self-care and have online self-assessment tools to help men know when it’s time to speak with a healthcare professional. Opening up about mental health and normalizing a discussion around depression, anxiety and suicide risk is something that men can do for themselves and for each other.

The Importance of Social Connection - Social connection is essential to our health and well-being, and an increasing number of Americans report loneliness and social isolation. Research shows that people who experience loneliness and isolation are at increased risk of heart disease, dementia, stroke, depression and

anxiety. Lacking social connection can even increase the risk of premature death to levels comparable to smoking. On the other hand, maintaining social connection promotes better physical and mental health, eases stress and even promotes a healthier immune system. Taking simple steps like answering a phone call from a friend, inviting someone to share a meal or volunteering in your community can help you to feel connected. The US Surgeon General recently issued a first-of-its kind advisory on the epidemic of loneliness and isolation. In it, Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy outlines actions that we can take on a national, local and individual level to help us all stay connected.

Men's Health Month is the perfect time to chart your course to improved health. Keep up with health screenings and listening to your body when symptoms come up. Make mental health a priority and take steps to manage stress and stay connected.

For more health and wellness tips, visit the Lifespan Living blog.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL: Alzheimer's Association 1-800-272-3900

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