

Men's Health - Prevention & Screening
Women's Health and Men's Health Carry Equal Importance.

(Holy Trinity Health Ministry)
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Prevention and screening interventions are essential components of health care and should be a priority for men to address with their health care professional annually. You need not be sick or have a complaint to schedule an annual visit. This is a time to update your overall health status, review your medication profile and immunization history, discuss risk factors for certain diseases and cancers, and identify ways to recognize warning symptoms and strategies to modify your risks. These visits also serve the purpose of developing and maintaining a mutual trusting relationship with your provider, vital to both parties.

Prevention strategies decrease the probability of developing a disease. The most commonly recognized prevention methods are immunizations (vaccines) to protect for flu, diphtheria, whooping cough, shingles, tetanus, etc. Vaccines can lessen the severity and length of illness from symptoms even if prevention is not always possible --- pain from shingles or mild influenza as opposed to a severe case. Prevention also involves effective education for promoting sanitary cooking, personal hygiene, and safe-sex practices, seat belt use, wearing helmets (cyclists), and firearm safety. Other strategies include use of sunscreens, malaria medication prophylaxis, mosquito control, protecting your cough and sneeze, water purification, etc.

The purpose of screening is to identify potentially serious diseases, that may already be present but are not currently causing symptoms. If symptoms are present, prompt evaluation is critical, as screening is no longer relevant. Screening also requires personal awareness of warning symptoms and risk factors for diseases. Some risk factors we can control --- what we eat, whether we smoke or consume alcohol, how much we exercise and sleep, and how long we remain sedentary. Other factors --- age, heredity (our genes), and gender --- are not under our control.

Health care professionals rely on scientific evidence to advise their patients regarding prevention and screening. It is helpful to focus on three separate age groups when considering men's health, as susceptibility to diseases and recommendations differ from one age group to another. Medline Plus highlights the priorities for each group.

Ages 18 to 39

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007464.htm>

Ages 40 to 64

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007465.htm>

Age 65 and older

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007466.htm>

There are many scientific papers whose authors have evaluated what works and what does not work for prevention and screening. However, studies can produce conflicting results. No wonder, there are legitimate disagreements, even among the experts. For colon cancer and breast cancer in women, the concerns are more about "when" to begin and end screening, but for prostate cancer it is more about "whether" to screen. As a result, many providers will recommend patients access information from websites of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, American Cancer Society, and Center for Disease

Control for understanding, guidance, and education.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force
<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/>
American Cancer Society
<http://www.cancer.org/>
Center for Disease Control
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/index.html>

These organizations have considerable credibility within the profession because of the scientific rigor they demand. Most would agree the information is valuable and useful. The above sites allow one to search for various diseases, their manifestations, risk factors, treatments, and recommendations. The information is updated whenever new and valid data are identified.

In general, health professionals will promote screening for common diseases when an effective screening tool is available, and when the science indicates the likelihood is favorable statistically for improving one's length of life. This is why screening for some cancers, depression, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, and abdominal aortic aneurysms are recommended.

Unfortunately prevention and screening programs are by no means universally accepted. A Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) report (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/coverage-1415estimates.htm>), commenting on the 2014-2015 flu season, revealed that vaccine was given to but 33% of those 18-49 years of age, under 50% in the 50-64 year old age group, and only 2/3rd of those 65 years and older. More telling was that women, more than men, had higher vaccine coverage rates, except in the senior population. Another CDCP report on colon cancer rates (<http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2013/p1105-colorectal-cancer-screening.html>) showed that only 1 in 3 adults between 50-75 years of age had been tested for colon cancer according to guidelines.

Health care professionals may not have all the answers, but they clearly view it their role and responsibility to assist their patients in navigating these topics. They can help clarify an issue, answer questions, and recommend a certain approach or intervention tailored to your specific needs. But only you can decide what is best for you. Shared decision-making is key.

Always Ask Two Questions ---

For someone my age, male gender, lifestyle, and physical characteristics, what do I need to do and understand about being...

(1) ...screened for certain cancers (breast, colon, lung, prostate, skin), and for depression, domestic violence, diabetes, falls, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.?

(2) ...immunized to prevent common infectious diseases --- Influenza, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Zoster, Hepatitis, and Pneumococcal Pneumonia?