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Men's Health and Fitness

Commonly Ignored Men's Health Issues

[Allison Van Dusen](#), 06.13.07, 12:01 AM ET

Dr. David Penson sees it all the time. Men facing common ailments have a lousy habit of trying to ignore their symptoms.

Instead of seeing a doctor right away, they'll put up with the problem for as long as possible out of embarrassment and fear that the treatment will be even worse. Or they start to think the whole thing is in their head.

They tend to be terrible patients.

[In Pictures: Commonly Ignored Men's Health Issues](#)

"There's sort of this societal expectation that guys are going to tough it out, that this is part of getting old," says Penson, associate professor of urology and preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine at USC in Los Angeles. "In 2007 men really don't have to live that way."

But they do. While only 12% of women reported making no doctors office visits in the previous year, the same was true for 26% of men, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2005 National Health Interview Survey.

Dr. Manny Alvarez, author of *The Checklist: What You and Your Family Need to Know to Prevent Disease and Live a Long and Healthy Life*, says too many men don't see the doctor until something is broken. Preventive care as simple as regularly wearing and reapplying [sunscreen](#) just isn't a high priority.

Ignoring your health, however, is bound to catch up with you. For men, that could be in the form of a shoulder sprain or rotator cuff injury from a lack of regular physical activity and a failure to [warm up](#) before playing a weekend basketball game. Procrastinate dealing with your high blood pressure and you could damage your blood vessels, eventually causing a heart attack, stroke or kidney disease.

Newborn Woes

Men also may not realize the impact a newborn [baby](#) can have on their health.

While there is a natural tendency as people age to spend less time exercising, a new University of Pittsburgh physical activity study shows having a baby can cause men to workout almost 4.5 fewer hours per week. Women's activity levels only fell by 1.3 hours per week.

Ethan Hull, a researcher and exercise physiologist for the University of Pittsburgh, says men may have experienced a greater drop because they were initially more active than women. Whatever the reason, men need to be more prepared for how a child will change their lives and, potentially, their waist lines. Hull suggests buying a jogging stroller, a bike baby seat or a carrier that allows men to take little ones on walks or hikes with them.

Knowing What's Normal

When it comes to their [prostate](#), Penson says men will delay seeing a doctor because they assume their symptoms are a natural part of getting older or that there are no easy treatments aside from surgery.

Though the prostate gets bigger as men age, it only proves bothersome for about one-third of men, causing them to frequently visit the bathroom and, once there, have trouble urinating, Penson says. But there are a number of effective treatments, such as alpha blockers, which relax the muscle around the bladder and prostate, as well as surgery.

Where It Hurts

Your back account could suffer too. A study released last month by the Better Hearing Institute shows that [untreated hearing loss](#) negatively affects household income, on average, by nearly \$23,000 per year, depending on the degree of loss. Hearing loss, which affects about 31.5 million people in the U.S., is more common in men.

"It's going to affect your performance and therefore your rewards, such as promotions and salary increases," says Sergei Kochkin, executive director of the Better Hearing Institute. "It's not the hearing loss that's the problem--it's that you're not communicating."

While many people think wearing a hearing aid is akin to admitting a disability, using a device can mitigate the impact on income by about 50%, according to the study.

There's also a lot men and women can do everyday to protect their hearing, including listening to their iPods at 50% maximum volume and wearing earplugs while at rock concerts, using power tools, riding motorcycles and shooting, Kochkin says.

Open Up

Bottom line: When it comes to their health, men need to pay more attention to their bodies and be aware that help is there for the taking if they're willing to ask for it.

"If it's changing the way you live your life," Penson says, "you need to think about acting."