

## Health checks for men

Men should have regular health checks. See your doctor for regular medical check-ups to help you stay healthy and to pick up early warning signs of disease or illness. Cardiovascular (heart) disease, diabetes and some cancers can often be picked up in their early stages, when treatment may be more successful.

When you have a health check, your doctor will talk to you about your medical history, your family's history of disease and your lifestyle. Your diet, weight, how much you exercise and whether or not you smoke will also be discussed.

If you have high-risk factors, such as a family history of a disease, it may be more likely that you will develop a particular disease. Regular check-ups may help your doctor pick up early warning signs. For example, high blood pressure may be an early warning sign of cardiovascular disease.

### Health care at home

Health checks and staying well should be part of your regular routine. This will help you stay healthy and pick up potential problems early. Things you can do at home include:

- **Skin checks** – you should check your skin for unusual moles or freckles. See your doctor if you notice anything unusual. Men at high risk (for example, those who work outdoors) need a yearly examination by their doctor or dermatologist.
- **Dental care** – you can reduce your risk of tooth decay, gum disease and tooth loss if you clean your teeth regularly and eat a low-sugar diet. Visit the dentist at least once a year for a dental examination and a professional cleaning.
- **Testicle checks** – from puberty onwards, you should check regularly for unusual thickenings or lumps in the testicles. See your doctor if you are concerned.

### Heart health checks

Health checks for heart disease may include:

- **Blood pressure** – have your blood pressure checked every two years if your blood pressure is normal, you are aged under 40 years, and there is no family history of high blood pressure. Have it checked yearly if you are over 40, your blood pressure is on the high side or you have a personal or family history of high blood pressure, stroke or heart attack. Be advised by your doctor.
- **Blood tests** – these check cholesterol levels and blood triglycerides, among other things. High levels may indicate an increased risk of various health problems including heart disease. If you're over 45, you should have these blood tests once every five years. If you're at high risk of cardiovascular disease and have a family history, you should be tested every year from the age of 40.
- **Obesity tests** – being overweight is a significant risk factor for many health conditions, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Ask your doctor to check your body mass index (BMI) and waist measurement every two years if you are aged under 40 years. If you are older than 40, you should have your weight checked annually.
- **Electrocardiogram (ECG)** – this is a non-invasive and painless medical test that detects cardiac (heart) abnormalities by measuring the electrical activity generated by the heart as it contracts. If you are aged over 50 years, your doctor may recommend an ECG test every two to five years, depending on your health and medical history.

### Diabetes

Tests for diabetes include a fasting blood sugar level test, which measures the amount of glucose in the blood after you haven't eaten for a while. Depending on your risk level, you will need to be tested annually or once every three years.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include:

- Family history of diabetes
- Pre-diabetes (slightly elevated blood glucose levels)
- Age over 45 years
- Overweight or obesity
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Smoking
- Sedentary lifestyle
- History of angina (chest pain), heart attack or stroke
- Particular ethnic backgrounds.

## Prostate cancer

There are disagreements among experts on prostate cancer screening, so discuss the pros and cons with your doctor. If you're over 50, an annual digital prostate examination may be recommended. This means the doctor inserts a gloved and lubricated finger into your anus to feel for changes to the prostate gland.

The prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test is not recommended as a screening test for the general population. A positive PSA blood test must be confirmed with the digital test and other tests including a biopsy of the prostate.

If you have a family history of any type of cancer, including prostate cancer, you may need to have a PSA and digital test regularly after you turn 40. Ask your doctor for advice.

## Bowel cancer

The faecal occult blood test (FOBT) uses chemicals to check a stool (poo) sample for blood. If you're over 50, you should have this test once every two years, or after you turn 40 if you have a family history.

Men at high risk of bowel cancer may need a colonoscopy every five years. During this test, the doctor inserts a slender instrument called a colonoscope through the anus to visually check the rectum and large bowel for any abnormalities.

## Eye conditions

If you already wear prescription glasses or contact lenses, you should have your eyes tested every year. Younger adult men who don't wear prescription glasses or contact lenses should have an eye test every two years.

Eyesight tends to deteriorate with age. Serious eye conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration are more common with age. Men older than 60 years should have an annual exam. However, more frequent testing may be recommended for men with certain risk factors, such as:

- Family history of eye disease
- Personal history of eye disease or injury
- Certain medical conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes
- Certain medicines.

See your doctor or eye care specialist for more information.

## Bone density

Osteoporosis can affect men as well as women. Advancing age is a significant risk factor. A bone density test helps to determine the health of your bones. Bone density testing is most often used when people have:

- Osteoporosis or concerns about osteoporosis
- A vertebral (spinal) deformity
- Osteopaenia (decreased bone density)
- A previous fracture.

Generally speaking, men over the age of 50 should have regular bone density tests. Be advised by your doctor.

## Other health topics

Your health check-up may include discussion about other health concerns, such as:

- Unusual symptoms you may be having
- Immunisation status
- Alcohol and drug issues
- Mental health concerns such as depression
- Erectile dysfunction or other sexual problems
- Injuries
- Relationship problems.

Your doctor may be able to help you directly. Sometimes, your doctor may refer to you specialists for diagnosis and treatment.

## Other tests

You may need other regular tests not listed here depending on your personal or family medical history. Ask your doctor for further information.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Dentist
- Eye specialist.

## Things to remember

- Men should see their doctor for regular medical check-ups.
- Screening tests help doctors to detect many diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers in their early stages.
- A man at high risk of a particular disease should be regularly tested regardless of his age.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Centre for Advancement of Men's Health

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