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June: A Good Month for Men to Boot Out Bad Health Habits

By Dr. Daniel Barrett

Since 1994, June has been recognized as Men's Health Month, a time to learn about the unique health challenges men face and the steps they can take to prevent such problems.

I am glad to see men in Corvallis taking a more proactive role in recent years because we've all heard how men are less inclined to visit the doctor. In fact, a report about 10 years ago by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed "the rate of doctor visits for such reasons as annual examinations and preventive services was 100 percent higher for women than for men." In my practice that has changed for the better in recent years. Many of my male patients are feeling better by ditching some bad habits and establishing a healthier lifestyle. I hope to continue seeing that rate increase because we all can do better.



Daniel Barrett, M.D.

So, if there are two truisms I can convey to men during this month – and especially on this day, Father's Day – it is that a healthy lifestyle and preventive maintenance go a long way in extending a quality life and avoiding premature aging.

Below are some actually simple steps you can take to improve your health.

Stop Smoking

Smoking increases your risk for heart disease, the leading cause of death in men. It also causes stroke and osteoporosis. Smoking also greatly increases your risk for lung cancer, the leading cause of cancer deaths in men. It also has been linked to cancers of the throat, mouth, esophagus, pancreas, kidney, and prostate. It causes emphysema and chronic bronchitis and can damage your skin, causing wrinkles. And, smoking can also put a wrinkle in your sex life - by causing impotence.

Nicotine is very addictive, and it can be hard to quit. Some people can give smoking up cold turkey, but only after trying two or three times before they are able to give it up for good. There are smoking cessation methods and programs, some involving healthcare professionals and medications. Talk to your provider about these. Millions of people have given up smoking. You can too.

Oh, and this might seem obvious, but I'll say it anyway: If you have not started smoking yet – Don't!

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Obesity has been linked to heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, along with the following cancers: colorectal, esophageal, kidney, pancreatic, and possibly prostate. Maintaining a healthy weight with diet and exercise goes a long way in preventing these diseases.

Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains. Choose vegetable oils, especially those rich in monounsaturated oils, such as olive oil and canola oil. Avoid salt-preserved foods, preserved meat, and red meat. Limit alcoholic beverages to no more than two per day. Keep away from trans fats found in deep-fried foods and anything made with hydrogenated oils, such as margarine, peanut butter, and shortening. Eat only healthful fats, such as the omega-3 oils found in salmon and other cold-water fish, which actually protect against heart disease.

Exercising regularly has enormous physical and emotional benefits. Besides reducing the risk for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis, regular exercise can be helpful in improving your general mood and reducing the risk for depression. And it need not be a complicated exercise regimen. A brisk, 30-minute walk most days of the week can do the trick.

Eating the right foods and making time for a workout can take commitment and self-discipline, but when you start feeling good, I mean really good, you won't believe that it is also preventing cancer and heart disease. In time, you'll come to realize what simple measure they really are.

Get check-ups and preventive screenings

Monitoring your health can help you stay one step ahead of some of the things that put you at risk for discomfort and disease. Ask your health care provider about how often you need a checkup. And, if there's something that's bothering you, such as a pain that's been hanging around for more than a couple weeks, make sure to make an appointment.

The frequency of screenings depends on your age and your risk factors for disease. Some of the basic ones are as follows:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol

- Diabetes (blood sugar)
- Mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety
- Weight
- Colorectal cancer (starting at 50)

The bottom line: Be a man and take the preventive steps and lifestyle changes needed for a healthier you. You – and your family and friends – will be grateful.

Daniel Barrett, M.D., is a family medicine physician at The Corvallis Clinic. He can be reached at 541-754-1987.