

Men's Health Awareness

As men age, the probability of health complications dramatically increases, which is why part of June is dedicated to men's health awareness. The purpose of this month is to alert men to possible health concerns and provide them with knowledge pertaining to visible symptoms, information about testing, treatment options, as well as prevention for future health risks.

Prostate Health

Perhaps one of the most prevalent health concerns with aging men is a Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH), also known as an enlarged prostate. An estimated 50 percent of men have evidence of BPH by age fifty and more than 75 percent of men over the age of eighty.

Symptoms may include frequent urination, leaking or dribbling, or difficulty starting a stream of urine. It is recommended that men over 50 receive a yearly physical to examine their prostate for signs of growth and to check for a more serious health risk, prostate cancer. Symptoms for prostate cancer are very similar to that of BPH, but some of the differentiating symptoms include blood in the urine, pain when ejaculating, and unintended weight loss and/or loss of appetite.

There are two primary methods of testing for prostate cancer: A rectal exam or a PSA. Examinations with your physician can determine if prostate cancer is present. The PSA test is less intrusive (by taking blood and measuring levels of prostate-specific antigens), but is also less accurate. Increased PSA levels can be caused by a much less serious problem such as an infection.

The first stage of **treatment** begins with an increased frequency of doctor visits and tests to measure the speed of cancer growth. This option, called "watchful waiting," is primarily for those whose symptoms are almost unnoticeable and whose cancer is growing very slowly. If the cancer shows signs of rapid growth, methods such as drug therapy, radiation, or surgery may be necessary.

Risk factors, both genetic and those in the environment, increase the likelihood of prostate cancer occurring. For example, studies have shown that African American males have a much greater chance for this type of cancer than Caucasians. Men with diets high in fat are found to be at a greater risk for prostate cancer. A family history, specifically in the brother or father, is perhaps the greatest indicator of possible risks.

Research is currently being conducted to discover new methods of **preventing** prostate cancer, or reducing the complications which arise from it. Proscar and Avodart are two medications which have been used to reduce the probability of prostate cancer occurring, ask your physician for more details.

Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)

Due to work demands, time for exercise and eating healthy meals is limited and sometimes neglected, resulting in weakened muscle development of the heart and increased buildup of cholesterol and plaque. Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) is the result of fatty buildup on the walls of blood vessels. The increased strain on the heart can lead to heart pains caused by an obstructed artery, called angina, and possibly a heart attack. It is common that the victim not exhibit any of the symptoms up until the heart attack. This may be because the heart is capable of supplying blood to the

body during rest, but during physical activity, the demand for oxygenated blood increases, and the supply cannot move quickly enough through clogged arteries.

The effects of CHD can be worsened by a number of factors such as: Obesity or being overweight, lack of exercise, cigarette smoking and second-hand smoke, diabetes, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, advanced age, gender (being male), and family history of CHD or heart attack. Family history seems to be the strongest predictor of heart attacks due to CHD.

Although, some factors cannot be eliminated (e.g. genes), it is possible to reduce the chances of having a heart attack by **limiting risk behaviors** which contribute to the disease and **increasing the number of protective factors** which reduce the probability of a heart attack. Some examples of actions that can be taken to improve overall well-being are: Drinking tea or consuming other foods with antioxidants, avoiding or reducing stressful activity, exercise, and reducing amount of fatty foods eaten (e.g. red meats).

It is often difficult to get motivated to make the changes necessary to help keep ourselves happy. If you, or someone you love, needs help a psychologist can assist in putting together a plan with your primary care physician to make those changes happen.