Health checks for men

Summary

- If you are a man, have regular medical check-ups.
- They can help you stay healthy, talk about any concerns and pick up early warning signs of disease or illness.
- Screening tests may help your doctor to detect diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers in their early stages.
- If you are at high risk of a particular disease, get tested for that disease regularly, regardless of your age.

Men need regular health checks. Medical check-ups help you stay healthy, talk about any concerns and pick up early warning signs of disease or illness. Diseases such as cardiovascular (heart) disease, diabetes and some cancers can often be picked up in their early stages, when treatment may minimise or prevent complications and progress.

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. They will also talk to you about your diet, your weight, how much you exercise and whether you smoke or drink.

If you have high risk factors, 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 checks at home

Make health checks and staying well 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 – check your skin regularly for unusual moles or freckles and look for any changes in the colour, size or shape of any spots. See your doctor if you notice anything unusual. If you are at high risk (for example, if you work outdoors) have a yearly examination by your 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 clean.
- testicular self-examination – from puberty onwards, check your testicles regularly for unusual thickenings or lumps. See your doctor if you are concerned.

Heart health checks for men

If you have certain risk factors for heart disease, your doctor may recommend that you have heart health checks. These may include:

- blood pressure checks – 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.
  - 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 (good and bad) and triglyceride levels, among other things. High levels may indicate an increased risk of heart disease. It is recommended that you have a blood test:
  - once every five years – if you’re over 45 and if your risk of heart disease is normal.
  - every year from the age of 40 – if you’re at high risk of heart disease and have a family history of it.

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- **obesity tests** – being overweight is a significant risk factor for many health conditions, including heart 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
  - every year, if you are older than 40

- **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. Tell your doctor if you have an irregular heart beat or are aware of your heart beat other than when you exercise.

**Diabetes checks for men**

Your doctor may recommend that you be tested for type 2 diabetes if you have any of the following **type 2 diabetes risk factors**:  
- pre-diabetes (slightly elevated blood glucose levels)
- a family history of diabetes (for example, if you have a first-degree relative with type 2 diabetes)
- being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person aged 35 and over
- being aged 35 and over and of Pacific Islander, Maori, Asian (including the Indian subcontinent, or of Chinese origin) Middle Eastern, North African or Southern European background
- being aged 45 and over and being obese or overweight, having high blood pressure or having a first-degree relative with type 2 diabetes
- cardiovascular disease, such as heart attack, angina (chest pain), stroke, or narrowed blood vessels
- being aged 55 or over
- taking certain antipsychotic medication or corticosteroid medication
- being overweight or obese, especially around the waist
- sedentary lifestyle – having low levels of physical activity, including more than two hours of television watching per day
- unhealthy eating habits, such as regularly choosing high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt or low-fibre foods
- cigarette smoking.

Tests for diabetes include a fasting blood sugar level test, which measures the amount of glucose in your blood after you have fasted (haven’t eaten for a while). Depending on your risk level, you may need to be tested annually or once every three years. Be advised by your doctor.

**Prostate cancer screening for men**

Prostate cancer screening is not recommended for the general public, so discuss the pros and cons of having a test for prostate cancer with your doctor.

If you’re between the ages of 50 and 70, a **prostate specific antigen (PSA) test** may be appropriate depending on:

- your general health
- your level of concern
- any symptoms you have
- any risk factors (such as a family history).

If the PSA test result is high it may lead to other tests.

A digital rectal examination (DRE) by your GP is not recommended as a routine test. However, your doctor may do a DRE with a PSA test. When doing a DRE, the doctor inserts a gloved and lubricated finger into your anus to feel for changes to the prostate gland. This allows the doctor to assess the size and texture of the prostate and may help the doctor decide if further tests are required, including referral to a urologist for an MRI.

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

**Bowel cancer screening for men**

Did you know that up to 90 per cent of bowel cancers can be successfully treated if they are detected early?

Screening for bowel cancer in people who do not have any symptoms and are aged between 50 and 74 years helps to detect cancer early.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) offers free bowel cancer detection kits to eligible people between the ages of 50 and 74 years. (You’ll receive it in the mail.) By 2020, all eligible people between 50 and 74 years will be offered free testing every two years.

The test used to screen for bowel cancer is called the faecal occult blood test (FOBT). It uses chemicals to check a stool (poo) sample for blood, which may be a sign of bowel cancer. Completing the test is quick and easy and you can do it at home. Just follow the instructions and then return your samples in the prepaid envelope supplied.

It’s recommended that you have an FOBT once every two years:

- if you’re over 50, or
- after you turn 40, if you have a family history of bowel cancer.

If you are at high risk of bowel cancer you 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 your rectum and large bowel for any abnormalities.

**Eye tests for men**

Eyesight tends to deteriorate with age. Serious eye conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration are more common with age, so it’s recommended that men older than 60 years have an eye exam every year.

You might need to be tested more often if you have 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
- taking certain medicines
- smoking.

If you are younger than 60 years and you wear prescription glasses or contact lenses, it is recommended that you have your eyes tested every year. If you don’t wear prescription glasses or contact lenses, you only need to have an eye test every two years.

See your doctor or optometrist (eye care specialist) for more information.

**Bone density checks for men**

Osteoporosis means ‘bones with holes’. It occurs when your bones lose minerals such as calcium more quickly than your body can replace them. This makes them become less dense, lose strength and break more easily.

Osteoporosis is more common in women, but it affects men as well. Advancing age is a significant risk factor.

Having a bone density test can help to determine the health of your bones. Bone density testing is most often used when people have:

- previously diagnosed osteoporosis
- osteopaenia (decreased bone density)
- a history of long-term use of corticosteroid medication
- poor nutrition
- inadequate amounts of dietary calcium
• low vitamin D levels
• alcohol intake of more than two standard drinks per day
• caffeine intake of more than three cups of coffee or equivalent per day
• lack of physical activity
• chronic kidney or liver disease
• thyroid disease or an overactive thyroid gland
• chronic bone pain particularly spinal pain
• a previous fracture.

So, if you are over 60, consider having a bone density test. Be advised by your doctor.

Other health tests and topics for men

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

• any unusual symptoms you are having
• your immunisation status
• alcohol and drug issues
• mental health concerns such as depression or anxiety
• erectile dysfunction or other sexual problems
• sexual health and sexually transmissible infections
• reproductive health, including preconception health
• injuries
• relationship problems.

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

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 GP (doctor)
• Dentist
• Eye specialist, such as an optometrist or orthoptist