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Men, Take Care of What's under Your Own 'Hood'

**By Melanie Reynolds
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Men, are you better at getting your car tuned regularly than taking care of your own health?

If the answer is yes, then you're not alone: Men are 24 percent less likely than women to see a doctor, according to the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. They're about half as likely to seek preventive care.

But this dismissive attitude toward health care can have dire consequences.

"There's a silent health crisis in America," according to *The State of Men's Health*, a 2014 report by the Men's Health Network (MHN). "It's the fact that American men live sicker and die younger than American women."

Statistics show that, on average, American men die about five years younger than their female counterparts. In Montana, it's closer to seven.

While the reasons for this gender gap are partly biological, men's approach to health plays a significant role. Some experts speculate that men feel pressured by society to be tough and invincible. They put up with pain and put off seeking medical care. When they finally do see a doctor, their condition is more likely to be serious.

As men get older, they get more willing to seek medical attention, but by then it may be too late. Avoiding health care early in life can contribute to poor health later on. That's because many of the leading causes of death are preventable and can be treated if found early.

Leading Causes of Death

Heart disease and cancer are the top two causes of death for both men and women. But men are more likely than women to die of accidental injuries, suicide, and chronic liver disease.

Heart Disease. About 20 percent more men than women die of heart disease, and heart problems tend to show up in men about 5-10 years earlier. Experts believe women's naturally higher levels of good cholesterol (HDL) may help to protect their heart. Men may have to work harder to reduce their risk of heart disease.

Cancer. Statistics show that half of all men will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime, compared to about a third of women. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer found in men, while lung cancer is the leading cancer killer of men.

Accidental Injuries. Men are twice as likely as women to die from unintentional injury. Many of these injuries occur because of motor vehicle crashes. Men also account for about 9 out of 10 workplace-related injuries and deaths.

Suicide. Montana has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation. Men here end their own lives about four times as often as women. Suicide is the number two cause of death among males aged 10 to 34.

Some experts believe these tragic statistics are due to undiagnosed depression in men. Males may be less likely to show signs of depression. Or they may exhibit less obvious signs, including anger, aggression, work burnout, risk taking, or alcohol and substance abuse. That makes it harder for them to recognize depression and seek help.

Problem drinking also has been associated with a higher rate of suicide. Men binge drink about twice as much as women and face higher rates of alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations.

Chronic Liver Disease. Men are almost twice as likely to die of liver disease as women. Alcohol and tobacco use increase the chance of developing liver disease.

Steps to Better Health

If you think men's health is just a men's issue, think again. It's a family issue – because it impacts wives, parents, and children, too. For example, almost half of all widows who live in poverty were not poor before the death of their husbands, according to MHN.

Besides, all of us can make a difference by encouraging the men in our lives to lead healthier lifestyles. Here are some steps men can take – for their loved ones and themselves:

- See a doctor for a physical every two years until age 65 and every year after that.
- Have an eye exam every 1-3 years.
- Have a dental exam and cleaning every year.
- Get regular screenings for blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, and specific cancers.
- Get recommended immunizations.
- Avoid or quit using tobacco products.
- Drink in moderation (no more than two drinks a day before age 65 and one drink a day after that).
- Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day, most days of the week.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables and less saturated or trans fats.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

- Wear a seat belt, and follow the speed limit.
- Don't drive while sleepy or under the influence of alcohol or other substances.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Learn to manage stress.

For more information:

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: <http://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/patient-involvement/healthy-men/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/men/>

Men's Health Network: <http://www.menshealthnetwork.org/>