

Quick Tips for Men's Health

Men, you may think you're invincible. But ignoring issues bothering your bodies and minds won't make them disappear. Here are some tips to keep you healthy.

What's Up Doc?

- Make an appointment this week to schedule a checkup with your healthcare provider.
- Get your blood checked. A quick blood test offers a snapshot of some of the factors that can put you most at risk for heart disease and diabetes—including high cholesterol, triglycerides, and glucose levels.
- Go smoke-free. Giving up smoking can really give your heart and lungs a break, in turn lowering your risk for heart disease and lung cancer.

Break a Sweat

- Take a brisk walk when you come home from work.
- If you commute by public transportation, get off a stop or two early on your way to work to get in a few extra steps and energize your body and mind for the day.
- Listen to your body when engaging in physical activity—some discomfort from exertion is okay, but not pain from overstraining or injury.
- Keep a chart of the physical activity that you've accomplished. Tracking your progress is highly motivating and can reinforce positive and healthful habits.

Take It Easy

- Do breathing exercises for relaxation.
- Unplug from common distractions such as television, computers, cell phones, etc.

- Bond with family or friends over a shared meal.
- Take a short mental vacation by visualizing your favorite getaway—a river, a beach, the mountains, etc.

Beat the Blues

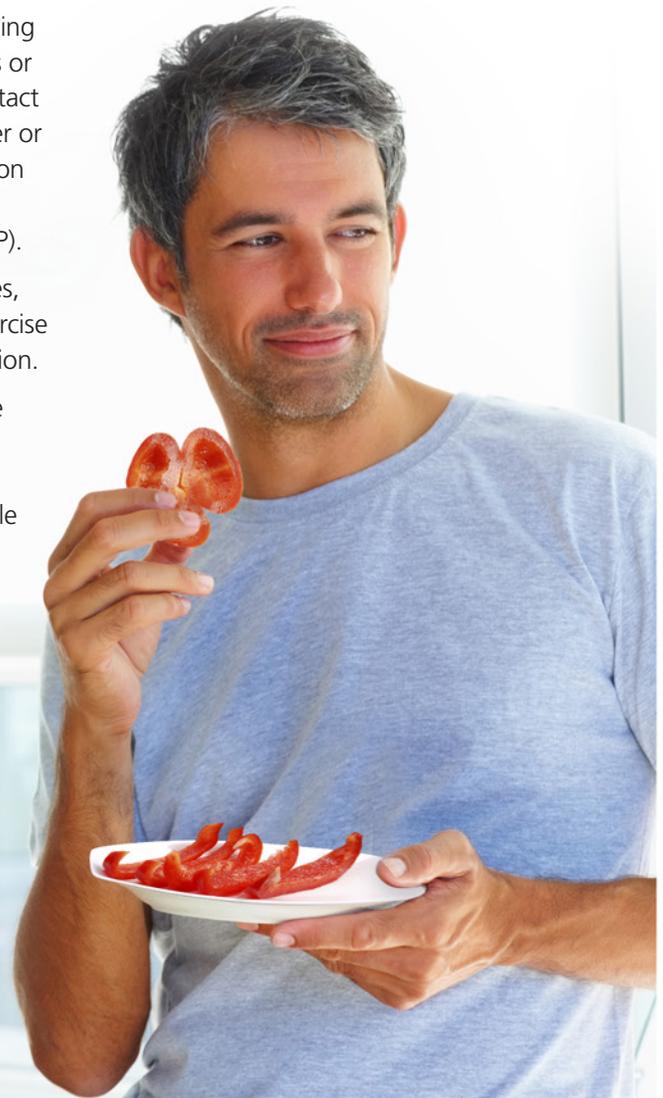
- Go alcohol-free. Alcohol can be a depressant.
- Seek help if you are feeling overwhelmingly anxious or depressed. You can contact your health care provider or receive a free consultation through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Get active. In some cases, physical activity and exercise can help relieve depression.
- Get some light. If you're experiencing seasonal affective disorder (SAD), light therapy may be able to help.

Apple of My Eye

- Snack on fresh fruits or vegetables instead of other high-calorie, low-nutrition choices. Red bell peppers, kiwis, broccoli, strawberries, papaya, or oranges are great options packed with vitamin C.

- Bring a nutritious lunch to work. Not only will you have a homemade and energizing meal, you'll also save a lot of money.

Taking care of yourself is part of being the best man you can be. There's nothing manly—or beneficial—about disregarding your health.



Pilates: Strength and Concentration

The mental engagement required during a Pilates routine fosters precise movement and can offer larger benefits from doing the exercises.

Pilates is a system of exercise that focuses on alignment and strengthening the muscles in the core of the body.

If you have lower back pain, consult your physician first to ensure these exercises are safe for you. Discontinue any exercise that causes or increases pain.



PELVIC LIFTS The set begins with warming up the spine and abdominal muscles with pelvic lifts. Start by lying on your back concentrating on the abdominal muscles and slowly lifting the pelvis to the point where just the lower back comes off the ground. Then, go higher as your lower and mid-back come off the ground. Finally, lift the pelvis high enough to lift most of the back off the floor (the shoulders will remain in contact with the floor). Do about five repetitions for each modification of exercise to target the three sections of the spine.



THE HUNDRED Lying flat on your back, use your abdominal strength to press the lower back to the floor while gently and mindfully bring your head, shoulders, and legs off the ground. Remember to re-engage your abdominal muscles to help keep your spine elongated and on the floor. With the hands stretched out long, beat the air. Count out the beats—start with 20 to 25 beats and work yourself up to 100.



THE ROLL UP Lying flat on your back with your arms extended above your head, use your abdominal strength to slowly lift your upper torso off the floor. Roll up slowly lifting your spine off the floor in a controlled way—one vertebra at a time—as you reach toward your feet, with your arms providing balance. When you get up to a ninety-degree angle, slowly roll back down again—concentrating on rolling down one vertebra at a time. Do about 10 repetitions and work up to 20 to 25.



SWIMMING Lying on your belly, stretch your arms and legs away from the pelvis. Gently and mindfully lift the arms and legs as if you were swimming. Alternately, lift the left arm and the opposite leg. Then, lift the right arm and the opposite leg. Like the Hundred, count out the beats—start do 20 to 25 each set and work yourself up to 100 total.

The Benefits of Meditation

Meditation is a way to relax and renew the mind, body, and the spirit. Meditation is not necessarily about having no thoughts; it's about not reacting to your thoughts and allowing those thoughts to simply come and go.

The most obvious benefit of meditation is relaxation. Sitting quietly and consciously helps relax the body and the mind. Researchers have been exploring the possibility of the positive effects of meditation on anxiety, asthma, blood pressure, depression, the immune system, pain, sleep, and substance use. Additionally, meditation is a useful way to bring your emotions into balance.

While meditation can have positive effects on the body and mind, you should not use it as a substitute for regular, medical therapies—if they are needed. Always discuss with your health care provider any practice you're doing or supplements you're taking that may affect your health or interact with your prescribed therapy.

Here's a simple meditation technique you can do anytime, anywhere:

Relaxed and effortless

Bring yourself to a relaxed and comfortable posture, either sitting on the floor or in a chair, or lying on your back. If sitting, make sure your spine is effortlessly extended upward.

Release

Exhale completely, leaving a slight pause at the end of the exhale.

Follow the breath

Allow the body to naturally inhale. Mentally say "one" while you inhale. Allow a slight pause before exhaling again.

Exhale and release

As you exhale, release all tension. Mentally say "and"—or some other single syllable word that holds either neutral or positive connotations while you exhale (words like "love," "joy," "fresh," etc.).

Continue the cycle

Repeat this breathing pattern in a slow, relaxed fashion. Each breath is a new beginning. "One" for the inhale signifies that each breath stands alone as a new start, a new moment.

Completing the meditation

Take your time coming back from the meditation experience. Give yourself a couple of minutes before you bring yourself back to your regular day.

Bringing yourself completely back

Slowly and gently bring yourself back—refreshed and renewed—to a new phase of your day with a smile.

Enjoy the serenity.





Five Easy Ways to Reduce Added Sugar

Sugar is such a sweet temptation, but you can definitely get too much of it.

While sugar can help provide the body with energy, excess sugar intake provides no real nutritional benefits. Instead, the extra calories are stored as fat, which can expand your waistline and increases your chances of diabetes, heart problems, and liver disease.

Be cautious of added sugar. This is sugar that is added to food—like when you bake with sugar or when a manufacturer adds sugar to sweeten food products.

The American Heart Association recommends limiting your daily added sugar consumption to only seven percent or less of your daily calorie intake—that's about six teaspoons (100 calories) for women and nine teaspoons (150 calories) for men. To put it in perspective, the sugar in a 12-ounce can of soda is about equivalent to 10 teaspoons of sugar—so you'll want to share that soda with a friend.

Decreasing your daily intake of added sugars can lower your calorie consumption without compromising nutrient intake. Here are some easy ways to avoid added sugars:

1) **Choose water.** Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks account for 36 percent of added sugars in the average American diet. When possible, have a glass of water or unsweetened tea or coffee instead.

2) **Read the labels.** Look for the sugar—listed in grams—on the nutritional facts panel. There are about four grams of sugar in a teaspoon. Also, check the ingredients list. The higher up that sugar appears on the list, the more processed sugar the product contains.

– Look for ingredients that ends in “ose”—i.e., glucose, fructose, sucrose, etc. Also, look for sugar “aliases”—corn syrup, corn sweetener, molasses, honey, and maple syrup.

3) **Eat fresh fruit.** This can give you the sweetness you crave with more nutrients and fiber.

4) **Keep a food diary.** Tracking what you eat helps you better understand what you're putting into your body. You'll have a clearer record of your added sugar intake.

5) **Go sugar-free.** When possible, choose the sugar-free version of your favorite foods.

Making these simple changes can help you avoid many unnecessary calories every day, which can help you maintain your current healthy weight—or lose weight if you need to.