

A Healthy You

Men's Health Edition

Independence

Age Fearless



Welcome to *A Healthy You!*

The choices you make every day play an important role in your health and well-being — and an *A Healthy You* guide from Independence Blue Cross (IBX) can help make those decisions easier.

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If you or a loved one is a Medicare beneficiary, visit **ibx.com/medicare**.

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Eating like a man

When it comes to eating, men can make a lot of poor decisions. Author Shawn Mahoney admits to spending a good stretch of his life blissfully uneducated about men's health and nutrition and making questionable choices, including:

- Going long periods without consciously eating fruits or vegetables
- Eating things on a dare
- Reading the list of "non-food" ingredients in a bag of chips and still devouring the entire thing
- Taking a cab through the White Castle drive-thru at 3 a.m.
- Passionately defending the merits of bacon as a superfood

Here's an excerpt from an interview Shawn had with registered dietitian John Rickards about men's nutrition and some of the misconceptions surrounding "manly" eating habits.

Why do you think we associate unhealthy eating with manliness?

Rickards: I think guys are less health conscious because they don't want to show that they care about their health or what they look like.

What else do you think contributes to the "man food" culture, besides the joy of gluttony?

Rickards: Historically, men were the hunters, the providers. And this culture has been reinforced by upbringing and probably marketing. Male vegetarians used to be unheard of, but a lot of guys are breaking that mold to be healthier.

Dietary standards dating back to the 1970s told us that fats were evil. It started the whole "low-fat" food industry. Why do you think that seems to be changing?

Rickards: We've learned a lot since then. Not all fats are bad. Unsaturated fat is considered good fat — it's what you get from healthy oils, fish, avocado, eggs, and dark chocolate. Trans fat, or partially or fully hydrogenated oil, is something you should really avoid.

My old college roommate used to ask people if he could eat the fat that they trimmed from their steak. Was he ahead of his time?

Rickards: Some saturated fat from meats, poultry, dairy, and junk food is okay in moderation. But your friend was no nutritional visionary. I suspect that the animal fat craze that has led to the popularity of paleo and high-protein diets will phase out over time in favor of more balanced diets.

Is there a way to determine how much is too much of whatever I'm eating?

Rickards: I subscribe to the fullness scale. Eat until you feel content, and try not to shovel it in. Take your time. If you eat too fast you can take in too many calories before your body realizes it.

What about serving sizes? I grew up in the era that glorified brontosaurus burgers and super-sizing. There's even a study that says men eat more when trying to impress women.

Rickards: Portion sizes are important. As far as single-portion guidelines, a protein should be about the size of your palm. A veggie or starch about the size of your fist.

Does the old standby of three squares a day — breakfast, lunch, and dinner — still apply?

Rickards: I recommend building a meal plan around your schedule. If your meals are spaced more than four hours apart, work in a snack. A snack should be substantial enough to carry you over to the next meal, so you're not too hungry and you don't wind up over-eating.

The FDA now requires chain restaurants to provide nutrition info. If I have to read before I eat, what should I be looking for on food labels?

Rickards: When reading nutrition labels, focus on quality calories. For instance, nuts are high in calories, but also include fiber, healthy fats, and protein. And watch your sodium. Sodium is an electrolyte that causes your body to retain water. Also look for sugar. New nutrition labels will include added sugar.

Why should I be concerned about added sugar?

Rickards: Added sugar is what's thrown in on top of naturally occurring sugars that you might find in fruit or carbs. A teaspoon of sugar is four grams. You really shouldn't have more than six to nine teaspoons per day. Sugar turns into stored fat in your body, particularly if you're not active. Which is why sugar is a culprit for several health concerns including obesity, high triglycerides, and diabetes.

Not including bacon, can you name three superfoods that men should be eating?

Rickards: Chia seeds, cacao, and blueberries are three superfoods I'd recommend.

You mean, Cha-cha-cha chia?

Rickards: Yes, same seeds. They're high in zinc and Omega 3s. Meat-and-potato guys lack Omega 3s. You can sprinkle them on a salad or mix them in with your oatmeal. Chia seeds are good for the prostate and help with regularity.

What are some other superfoods?

Rickards: Cacao is raw chocolate, and it's the most antioxidant-rich food in the world. High in fiber, it comes in nibs and powder. Great stuff to mix into a smoothie. And number three… blueberries. They're rich in antioxidants, high in fiber, and are among the lowest-sugar fruits. They also help with circulation. Oh, and bacon is not really a superfood.

Some studies have shown that red meat is brain food. Can we ruminate on that?

Rickards: Meat does include nutrients that support overall well-being, like vitamin B12, but not all red meat is created equal. There are different categories and cuts of meat. Ground meat can be fatty, and you can't always be sure what's in it. If you're going to eat red meat, get a lean cut, like a sirloin filet, or flank steak. Also, what an animal eats affects the quality of the meat. If you're going to have a steak, I'd recommend grass-fed beef.

Men love to grill anything, because… you know, fire and stuff. Is grilling always a good option?

Rickards: Grilling is a lean way to cook since the fat burns off, and you don't have to use oil. But open flames can produce char on meats, which can be carcinogenic.

Eggs: Scrambled, over easy, or Rocky-style?

Rickards: There is cholesterol in egg yolk, but half of the protein and almost all the vitamins in eggs comes from the yolk. The latest research shows that eggs don't contribute to high cholesterol. But I wouldn't recommend chugging your eggs. Raw eggs can make you sick if they have salmonella. I personally prefer scrambled. No disrespect to Rocky.

Any last thoughts on men's diet and nutrition?

Rickards: Just that everyone is different. Men and women have different dietary needs, but there are no gender-specific foods. Your diet should be tailored to you and your goals. Don't feed into the stereotypes. Try different foods. There are good tasting, healthy options out there. And salads are not "girly."

Hey, men. You may need nutritional counseling.

If you're looking for customized diet and nutrition advice with an expert, schedule a meeting with a nutritionist or registered dietitian. After just two visits, John assessed my eating habits, and provided some sound advice to make smarter eating decisions. He is helping me address my dietary needs related to being a type 2 diabetic.

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Adapted from: insights.ibx.com/eating-like-a-man-nutritionist-shares-expert-advice-on-mens-nutrition/



Your heart, your health

Have you ever considered that you might be at risk for heart disease? Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men of most races and ethnic groups in the United States, including African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Hispanics, and whites. For Asian American and Pacific Islander men, heart disease is second only to cancer as a cause of death.

Heart disease is responsible for 1 in 4 male deaths. Half of the men who die suddenly of heart disease have no previous symptoms. Even if you do not have symptoms you may still be at risk for heart disease.

High blood pressure, elevated bad cholesterol, and smoking are the biggest risk factors for heart disease, and about half of all Americans have at least one of these three risk factors.

So, how do you know if you are at risk?

Visit your doctor and lower your risk

You should visit your primary care physician once a year, even if you don't have any symptoms. Men tend to go to the doctor less often than women, even though they have an increased risk of heart disease just for being men.

Your doctor will check your blood pressure and perform a simple blood test to determine your cholesterol level. In addition, there are other medical conditions, like diabetes, that greatly increase your risk of heart disease. When your doctor checks your blood, he or she will also be able to determine if you are diabetic or prediabetic. Your doctor then will be able to calculate your "cardiovascular risk." This determines your chances of having a cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack or stroke, in the next ten years.

If your risk is elevated, you can discuss what measures you need to take to reduce it with your doctor. Your doctor can help you lower your blood pressure and high cholesterol and will discuss with you what lifestyle changes you should make.

Change your lifestyle

If you smoke, quit. Quitting smoking will lower your risk of heart disease enormously. You don't have to do this alone; your doctor can help you on this difficult journey. It does not matter if you have tried before, every time you try is a success.

In addition to smoking, being overweight or obese, having a poor diet, not exercising, and drinking too much alcohol all increase your risk of heart disease. Stress also harms your heart, directly and indirectly. When we are stressed, we tend to eat more and exercise less.

Find your healthy weight

Your doctor will let you know what a healthy weight is for you. Being overweight increases your risk of heart disease by at least 20 percent. To help you reach a healthy weight, you need to have a "moderate" diet that is rich in healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, with moderate use of whole grains, dairy, beans, and other legumes, and relatively low amounts of animal protein. Also watch how much sodium (salt) you consume, as sodium increases your blood pressure.

Together with a healthy diet, exercise lowers your risk of heart disease. The goal is to exercise 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Regularity is important, so choose something that you like. If you are not a gym person, brisk walking, cycling, or swimming are good alternatives.

Medication

If diet and exercise are not enough to reduce your cardiovascular risk, or if the risk is too high, your doctor will talk to you about medication. Cholesterol-lowering statin medication and daily low-dose aspirin can reduce your risk.

Making sure that you and your loved ones are healthy does not have to be difficult. Simple steps such as visiting your doctor and making health-conscious decisions regarding your lifestyle and diet can greatly decrease your risk of heart disease. So, the next time you are considering skipping your doctor's appointment, choosing what to eat for lunch, or pondering what to do with your free afternoon, think about your heart!

About the author
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Prostate screening: The great debate

Are you up to date on your preventive health screenings? Who, me? Yes, you!

Although most preventive health recommendations affect both sexes there is at least one important disease that affects only men, and that is prostate cancer. The prostate is the walnut-sized gland that produces the seminal fluid that nourishes and transports sperm. As men age, the prostate gland normally enlarges and occasionally becomes cancerous. After skin cancer, it is the most common cancer in men. About one in nine men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetime.

It develops mainly in older men and, more often, African-American men. About 60 percent of cases are diagnosed in men aged 65 and older, and it is rare to develop it before age 40. Prostate cancer can be a serious disease, but, thankfully, most men diagnosed with prostate cancer do NOT die from it.

Part of this is because prostate cancer, although common, is typically slow-growing. Frequently men have no symptoms alerting them to the cancer, and often some symptoms they do experience are merely signs of an enlarged prostate, not a cancerous one. Examples of prostate cancer symptoms are:

- Trouble urinating
- Decreased force in the stream of urine
- Blood in semen
- Discomfort in the pelvic area
- Bone pain
- Erectile dysfunction

Additionally, understanding your risk factors for developing the disease may also help you understand when and which men get offered screening tests. Factors that can increase your risk of prostate cancer include:

- **Age.** Your risk of prostate cancer increases as you age.
- **Race.** For reasons not yet determined, African-American men carry a greater risk of prostate cancer than men of other races. In African-American men, prostate cancer is also more likely to be aggressive or advanced.
- **Family history.** If men in your family have had prostate cancer, your risk may be increased. Also, if you have a family history of genes that increase the risk of breast cancer (BRCA1 or BRCA2) or a very strong family history of breast cancer, your risk of prostate cancer may be higher.
- **Obesity.** Obese men diagnosed with prostate cancer may be more likely to have advanced disease that's more difficult to treat.

So, now you know a little bit about prostate cancer. How common it is, what symptoms may or may not herald its onset, and what possible risk factors are associated with developing it. Now what do you do?

Do you just call your doctor and tell him/her you need to have a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test? Do you make an appointment with a urologist? Well, if you've been anywhere near the Internet lately, you might notice that a debate exists among medical professionals regarding the risks and benefits of prostate cancer screening, and medical organizations differ on their recommendations.

Some organizations give specific recommendations on specific tests starting at specific ages. Some actively discourage screening after a certain age. But, most importantly, they ALL say that the first thing to do is discuss the pros and cons of screening with your primary care provider. What might be appropriate for a 55-year-old African-American man with a family history of prostate cancer might be quite different than the advice for a 72-year-old Caucasian man who is currently living with diabetes and congestive heart failure.



A pharmacist's Rx for medication management

Medications work best when you take them as directed and understand how they interact with your life. Learn all you can about the medications you're prescribed.

Know what questions to ask

"Don't be afraid to ask questions," says Dr. Michael Fossler, a public policy expert with the American College of Clinical Pharmacology. Here are key questions he suggests you ask your doctor or pharmacist every time you fill a prescription.

Do I take this with food?

Some medications need to be taken with food, some should be taken while fasting, and for others it doesn't matter. Ask if you should wait a certain amount of time before or after eating.

Are there any foods I should avoid while taking this?

Some foods can alter the way a medication works. Grapefruit juice is probably the best-known example. The citrus affects the way the body absorbs medication.

If you are taking antibiotics, ask if you should monitor your intake of milk and dairy products. If you drink alcohol, find out if you should refrain from drinking while taking your medication.

What are the side effects?

All medicines have side effects. You'll want to know what the most common ones are, as well as the most alarming ones. Ask these questions:

- Do I need to be careful in the sun?
- Will this affect my ability to drive?
- Will this change my mood?
- Should I avoid caffeine?

"If you're running into a side effect you don't care for, don't stop taking the medicine," Dr. Fossler says. "Go back to your doctor's office and tell them you can't tolerate this side effect."

What about other medications?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist about every medication you take, as well as herbal or dietary supplements, allergy medicines, and even a daily aspirin. Be as specific as you can.

Can I stop taking this if I feel better?

Taking your medication as prescribed for the full duration is very important, particularly with antibiotics and disease medications. "With antibiotics, if you stop taking your meds when you start to feel better, your infection can rebound, and you'll need a stronger drug next time," Dr. Fossler says. Consult with your primary care physician if you are thinking about quitting your medication, or if you can't afford it. Your doctor or pharmacist may know of ways to help you save money on your prescription medications.

Don't forget your meds!

Protect your well-being and your wallet with these tips:

- **Ask your doctor to review all your medications.** Bring everything, including over-the-counter medications, and find out if they're all needed.
- **Switch to generics.** This could cut your out-of-pocket costs. If there is no generic option, ask if a generic in the same drug category could be right for you.

Adapted from: getgoodliving.com/article/health/pharmacists-rx-medication-management
Source: getgoodliving.com/article/health/dont-forget-your-meds



Facing life's challenges

Change is inevitable — and often stressful.

It's the one thing we can count on as we age, but how we deal with it can affect our mental health, relationships with others, and overall quality of life.

It's safe to say that every man deals with change differently. Some men are comfortable showing and sharing their emotions; others prefer to hide them, self-medicate, or focus on other activities to avoid dealing with how they feel. But these ways of "dealing" are ineffective and can lead to isolation and depression.

Try these healthy ways to help manage the stress that comes with life's changes:

- **Stay social.** Having a friend, someone who's got your back, is extremely important for your mental health and can greatly reduce your stress levels.
- **Exercise.** While any kind of exercise is good, aerobic exercise — 20 – 30 minutes, three or four times per week — is especially good. Studies have shown that aerobic exercise can reduce stress by as much as 50 percent.
- **Keep learning.** Don't be afraid to try something new or rediscover an old hobby. Set a challenge you will enjoy.
- **Be a volunteer.** Volunteering your time can be incredibly rewarding and will help you create connections with the people around you.
- **Don't self-medicate.** Abusing legal or prescription drugs and/or having more than seven drinks of alcohol per week will do you far more harm than good by damaging your health and raising your stress levels.
- **Eat healthy and take your vitamins.** Good nutrition is key to managing your physical and mental health.
- **Relax.** Try to get some downtime every day, even if it's only ten or fifteen minutes. Take walks, meditate, listen to music, or just sit and read.
- **Rest.** Try to get at least six — and no more than eight — hours of sleep every night.

Know the signs of depression

Social norms around what is "manly" can be harmful to men's mental health. Know the signs of depression in men, and don't put off getting care if you're:

- Feeling tired all the time
- Losing interest in activities you usually like
- Feeling angry, irritated, restless, or frustrated easily
- Drinking too much or abusing drugs or prescription medication
- Having trouble sleeping (falling asleep, staying asleep, or oversleeping)
- Avoiding family and friends

It's important to remember that you can't simply "snap out" of depression. Talk to your family doctor or health care provider. You can also find resources online or check with your health insurance carrier to find someone who participates in your plan network. Call **988** if you need immediate assistance.

About the author
Dr. Dario LaRocca currently serves as a medical director at IBX.



It’s time to schedule a checkup

It’s an age-old question without a simple answer: Why don’t men seek medical care when they need it? Perhaps it has something to do with the stereotypical image of the American man…self-sufficient, strong, resourceful, and showing little emotion. Or, perhaps it is because men who show emotion are often portrayed as being weak or less manly.

Whatever the reasons, men often view asking for help, medical or otherwise, as a sign of vulnerability.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that men are less likely than women to see a primary care physician and less likely to identify a specific physician as somebody they visit to discuss their problems. They are also less likely to obtain preventive screenings than women.[1] Since delaying medical care can lead to late detection of serious disease, reduced survival, and unnecessary suffering, let’s look at some of the other reasons men and women use to justify avoiding getting necessary care.

Studies have shown that men (and women) often dismiss the symptoms of potentially serious medical problems and choose to believe they will take care of themselves. In fact, one study showed that 17 percent of people with rectal tumors waited a year or more to seek medical advice after noticing symptoms, with some waiting up to five years.[2]

The main reason for putting off care? Many worry they have a serious problem or illness and are fearful of how it could change their life and their families’ lives.

Despite wanting to maintain an image of strength, when questioned, many men were genuinely concerned about the discomfort of a medical exam, which added to the delay.

Finding the right doctor for you

Consider these tips when looking for a doctor

- **Find a doctor who accepts your health insurance.** An in-network physician will accept payment according the rules of your plan, while choosing an out-of-network provider could leave you with a much larger out-of-pocket cost.
- **Consider both male and female doctors.** Some studies have shown that even though men say they are more comfortable choosing a male physician, they are actually more likely to discuss their concerns in greater detail when speaking with a female physician.
- **Choose someone you trust.** When you trust your physician, you are more likely to undergo preventive screenings and avoid complications from preventable diseases.
- **Decide whether you’d like a doctor who is close to home or close to work.** This is an individual preference, but the right choice will make it easier to see the doctor when you need to.
- **Call the office and ask questions.** Ask how long it usually takes to get an appointment for an illness. Don’t hesitate to ask how they send lab, x-ray, and other information to you. Ask if they have an electronic medical record, and, if so, do they have an online portal where you can see results.

Get to the doctor, man!

Seeking health care isn’t a sign of weakness or failure but rather a sign of strength, and it gives you the greatest chance of living a long, healthy life, with the least negative impact on your family.

Think of it this way: Take care of yourself as you would a favorite car that you’d like to keep running for as long as possible.

- Find a trusted mechanic (doctor).
- Get routine maintenance (preventive care).
- Seek help when new noises (symptoms) arise.

This will help keep your car (body) running soundly and functioning as an essential part of the family.

1 MMWR Weekly, January 20, 2017, 66(02);65
2 Delayed Treatment for Rectal Cancer, *Dis Colon Rectum.* 2005 Sep; 48(9): 1736–1741.



BBQ chicken sandwich

Servings: 4

Ingredients

Sauce

- ½ cup blackberries
- ¼ onion, chopped
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Sandwiches

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 4 whole grain burger buns
- Lettuce leaves (optional)
- Sliced tomatoes (optional)

Directions

1. Blend sauce ingredients for 30 seconds in a food processor. Set aside.
2. Spray skillet with cooking spray and set over medium-high heat. Cook chicken until the internal temperature reaches 165°F. Shred chicken into thick pieces with a fork and return to skillet. Stir in sauce and cook 1 to 2 minutes more.
3. Divide chicken among 4 buns, and top with lettuce and tomatoes (if using).

Adapted from: getgoodliving.com/good-living/recipe/main-dish/bbq-chicken-sandwich

Foil-pack Mediterranean salmon

Servings: 4

Cook time: 15 – 20 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 8 oz broccolini, ends trimmed
- 8 oz small red or fingerling potatoes
- 1 can (14 oz) white beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 lemons, juiced
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp salt-free Mediterranean spice blend
- 4 center-cut portions (5 oz) salmon fillet

Directions

1. Heat the oven to 400° F. Tear 4 sheets of aluminum foil, about 12" x 15" each.
2. Divide the vegetables into 4 equal portions and set in the center of each foil sheet. Add 1/3 cup beans to each.
3. In a small bowl, mix together the lemon juice and olive oil. Drizzle 2 tbsp over the veggies. Sprinkle each packet with ½ tsp spice blend.
4. Set a piece of salmon on top of the veggies, drizzle with remaining lemon juice mixture, and sprinkle with remaining spice. Fold up the sides of the foil and crimp together, forming a pouch. Transfer to a baking sheet.
5. Bake while covered until the fish is cooked through and veggies are tender, or about 15 to 20 minutes. Be careful when opening the packets, as they will be filled with hot steam.

Adapted from: getgoodliving.com/good-living/recipe/main-dish/foil-pack-mediterranean-salmon



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