MHN

Men's Health Network©

The Gap Guide

HOW MEN CAN CLOSE THE LIFESPAN GAP

THE HANDBOOK TO EASY AND SCALABLE WAYS FOR MEN TO LIVE A HEALTHIER AND LONGER LIFE

Closing the Lifespan Gender Gap

Since the Industrial Age, women in the U.S. have outlived men. However, the lifespan gender gap has widened in recent years, with the current six-year difference (women: 79, men: 73) marking the largest disparity in nearly 30 years (1996)[1]. That gap represents lost time with family, unfinished legacies, and fewer opportunities to make an impact on the world.

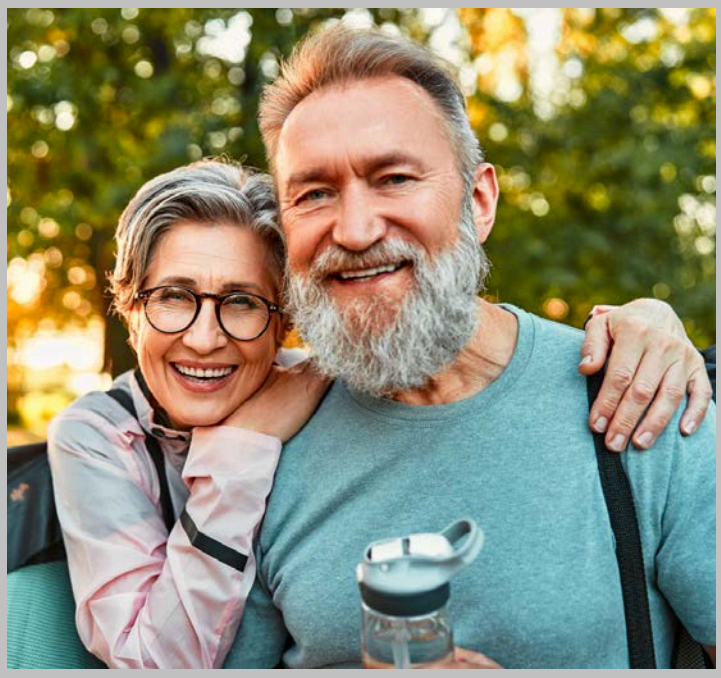
The gender gap in lifespan is a persistent health disparity that demands urgent attention and intervention. Why do women consistently outlive men? Is it simply biological destiny, or can men and their families take proactive steps to bridge this gap and live longer, healthier lives?

The answer lies in a complex interplay of genetics, healthcare access, and lifestyle choices. While some biological differences may contribute to the lifespan gap, research suggests that many of the factors shortening men's lives are modifiable.

This guide isn't about forcing a perfect diet or never skipping leg day at the gym—it's about showing you that small, scalable changes can make a substantial difference.

[1] Center for Disease Control

Know the Gap Facts: 3, 10, and 50



The facts underscore the urgent need to prioritize changes in health-seeking behaviors and for national intervention to raise awareness. Despite the alarming news, there is hope. By making informed choices, adopting healthy habits, and engaging in care early on if they have a medical problem, men can vastly improve their chances of living longer and healthier lives.

Men's Health Network, a 501c(3) charitable nonprofit, offers this FREE digital download guide as the roadmap to help you and the men you care about. We'll delve into six essential lifestyle habits that will most likely add those six years back into your life. The guide also gives insight on how to scale up to achieve these goals and shares what some experts say about how many years one could expect to gain by adopting these habits.

x3

SUICIDE

MEN ARE ABOUT THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE BY SUICIDE, A TRAGIC STATISTIC THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LACK OF ATTENTION ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG MEN.

10

HEART DISEASE

THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR MEN IN THE UNITED STATES, CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE, OR CVD, CLAIMS MORE MALE LIVES THAN ANY OTHER ILLNESS, AND ON AVERAGE, MEN DEVELOP THE DISEASE UP TO 10 YEARS EARLIER THAN WOMEN.

50%

CANCER

MEN ARE NEARLY 50 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP CANCER IN THEIR LIFETIME, AND IT'S PREDOMINANTLY DRIVEN BY PROSTATE CANCER AND HIGHER RATES OF LUNG, COLORECTAL, AND BLADDER CANCERS.

Six Lifestyles to Overcome the Stats

- PRIORITIZE CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH AND EXERCISE
- WEIGHT MANAGEMENT WITH A HEALTHY DIET
- FINDING BALANCE
- BUILD A TEAM OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS
- DON’T SMOKE AND LIMIT RECREATIONAL SUBSTANCES
- BUILD STRONG SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Lifestyle #1:

Prioritize Cardiovascular Health and Exercise

It's not breaking news that cardiovascular disease, or CVD, is the leading cause of death for American men. Many of us ignore it for many reasons; two common ones are that we think it's going to happen to someone else, and we feel fine and are, at least, in relatively decent enough shape not to develop heart disease. The truth is CVD is often referred to as the "silent killer" because it develops very slowly and without noticeable symptoms for many years (even decades). Risk factors like high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels, obesity, and smoking can quietly damage the heart and blood vessels. In its later stages, CVD has symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, or even sudden events like a heart attack or stroke. Addressing these hidden risks early can significantly reduce complications later.

PRO TIP

Prioritizing cardiovascular health early on in life or as soon as possible not only significantly improves the odds of staving off CVD, but it also reduces the risk of other leading killers like type 2 diabetes and stroke.

ABOUT HALF OF ALL ADULT MEN HAVE SOME FORM OF CVD. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT 80% OF CVD CAN BE PREVENTED.

CVD SYMPTOMS

- **Chest pain or discomfort**: This can feel like a squeezing or pressure in the chest
- **Shortness of breath**: Difficulty breathing, especially when exerting yourself
- **Fatigue**: Feeling unusually tired or weak
- **Heart palpitations**: Feeling like your heart is racing or fluttering
- **Swelling in the legs or ankles**: This can be a sign of heart failure.
- **Dizziness or lightheadedness**: Feeling faint or unsteady, which can indicate reduced blood flow to the brain.

CHEAT CODE: 911

If you have any of these symptoms, contact your health provider or call 911. It's far better to ask a doctor and find out it's indigestion than it is to have a heart attack and ignore the symptoms.

TARGET HEART RATE WHILE EXERCISING

How to Measure it: Lightly press the index and middle fingers of one hand on the opposite wrist, just below the base of the thumb OR at the neck, lightly press the side of the neck, just below the jawbone. Count the number of beats in 15 seconds and multiply by four. What's your heart rate?

Age	Beats per minute (50 percent to 85 percent)
20 years	100-170
30 years	95-162
35 years	93-157
40 years	90-153
45 years	88-149
50 years	85-145
55 years	83-140
60 years	80-136
65 years	78-132
70 years	75-128

Lifestyle #1:

Prioritize Cardiovascular Health and Exercise

150 MINUTES OF MODERATE EXERCISE OR 75 MINUTES OF VIGOROUS EXERCISE PER WEEK

=

INCREASED LIFE EXPENTENCY OF UP TO 31% [2]

THE GOAL: Exceed 150 minutes of moderate exercise (examples: walking, jogging, or casual bike ride) or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week (running, cycling, elliptical machine). Ultimately, the type of exercise doesn't matter as long as it's an activity gets your heart into the targeted zone.

Exercise reduces CVD risk by strengthening the heart, lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol, and decreasing inflammation.

MODERATE EXERCISE INTENSITY IS ABOUT 50 TO 70 PERCENT OF YOUR MAXIMUM HEART RATE, OR THE **YELLOW** ZONE, AS SOME CALL IT.

VIGOROUS EXERCISE INTENSITY IS ABOUT 70 TO 85 PERCENT OF YOUR MAXIMUM HEART RATE, OR THE **ORANGE** ZONE, AS SOME CALL IT.

Years added: Any combination of vigorous exercise (minimum of 75 minutes) and moderate exercise (minimum of 150 minutes) can reduce CVD between 35 to 42 percent and increase life expectancy by up to 31 percent (American Medical Association).

In the context of closing the lifespan gap and gaining six more years, it's about two years. However, depending on age and other health factors, experts say regular exercise can add over seven years to your life.

2 - 7

YEARS

[2] AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Lifestyle #1:

Prioritize Cardiovascular Health and Exercise

Achievable: While 150 minutes of walking per week or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise can significantly reduce CVD and lengthen life, not everyone can walk or run due to injuries or other limitations. The good news is that there are plenty of alternative ways to stay active and achieve these benefits. Consider low-impact options like swimming, cycling, or using an elliptical machine, which are gentle on the joints. Activities like yoga or Pilates can also improve flexibility and strength while providing cardiovascular benefits when done at a moderate intensity. The key is to choose something you enjoy and can safely perform—whether it's dancing, gardening, or even chair exercises—and focus on getting your heart rate up within your comfort zone. Remember, every bit of movement counts toward a healthier, longer life!

Just starting out? It's a good idea to talk with your healthcare provider to ensure you can safely start your new plan. A quick check-up can help identify any underlying conditions or limitations you should consider when creating your fitness routine.

Starting a new habit is the hardest part, but setting realistic, manageable goals can make the process more achievable. Gradually incorporate 15 minutes of brisk walking into your daily routine, aiming for consistency rather than perfection in the first few weeks. To make it more enjoyable, consider walking with a friend, listening to music, or exploring different routes to keep things fresh. As you get fitter, gradually increase the duration by 10 minutes per week for the first month. Afterward, start to increase the intensity of your workouts, such as by adding intervals of faster walking, light jogging, or incorporating hills into your route.

By following this pace and staying committed, you can improve your cardiovascular health, boost energy levels, and feel stronger in less than three months. Regular physical activity can also support mental health by reducing stress and enhancing mood, making it a win-win for both body and mind.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CARDIOVASCULAR CONDITIONS AND DISEASES, VISIT
WWW.MENSHEALTHNETWORK.ORG/CARDIOVASCULAR

Lifestyle #2:

Weight Management with a Healthy Diet

There are dozens of chronic conditions and diseases linked to weight management. According to the American Medical Association, many of the leading causes of death among American men can be reduced by 23 percent by achieving and maintaining a healthy diet and a healthy weight.

For example, losing just five percent of your body weight may reduce the risk of heart disease by as much as 40 percent and type-2 diabetes by 36 percent.[3]

Further, men with a five-point increase in BMI have a 50 percent increase in prostate cancer risk.[4]

Experts agree that diet and exercise work together to fast-track weight loss and increase lifespan. However, it starts with reducing calories through a healthy diet. Primarily known as the Mediterranean Diet, this diet of whole, unprocessed foods, healthy fats, and no to moderate alcohol consumption significantly increases a man's chances of living a longer and healthier life. The more closely we follow it, the better our chances. In addition to its impact on longevity, the Mediterranean Diet also supports better brain health, improved digestion, and reduced inflammation, promoting overall well-being.

[3] NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE
[4] HARVARD MEN'S HEALTH WATCH

GOAL: Get the Full 23 Percent

QUIZ

GIVE YOURSELF A POINT EACH TIME YOU ANSWER YES

ARE YOU CONSUMING...

1. At least two cups of vegetables every day?

2. Two pieces of fruit each day?

3. Two or more servings of whole grains (examples: Oatmeal, whole wheat bread, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta) per day?

4. Fish two or more times per week?

5. Beans or legumes four or more times per week?

6. Nuts or seeds almost every day (examples: Almonds, walnuts, pistachios, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds)?

7. Olive oil as the main source of fat (this also means minimal saturated fats like red meat and full-fat dairy products and trans fats like fried foods and baked goods)?

8. Glass of red wine or other foods high in antioxidants several times per week (examples: grapes, berries, bell peppers, tomatoes, onions, and dark chocolate)?

9. Red meat only one time per week at the most?

What's your Score?

- A SCORE OF 8 OR 9 IS IDEAL! YOU'RE GETTING **THE FULL 23 PERCENT BENEFIT**
- A SCORE OF 6 OR 7 INDICATES A **GREATER THAN 10 PERCENT BENEFIT**
- SCORES OF 4 OR 5 MEAN **LESS THAN 10 PERCENT BENEFIT**
- SCORES OF 3 OR LESS MEAN **NO MORTALITY REDUCTION**

Lifestyle #2:

Weight Management with a Healthy Diet

As Much as 13 Years?

Studies comparing the typical Western diet to the Mediterranean Diet reveal that adopting healthier eating habits can significantly extend men's lifespans, possibly up to 13 years. This impressive benefit comes from prioritizing nutrient-dense foods such as legumes, whole grains, fish, and fresh produce while cutting back on red and processed meats, refined grains, and sugary beverages. Incorporating meatless substitutes, like plant-based proteins, can make the transition easier and provide additional health benefits without sacrificing taste or variety.

The good news? It's never too late to make a change. Even for men past young adulthood, the benefits of adopting the Mediterranean Diet remain substantial. A 60-year-old man who transitions to this way of eating can gain up to eight additional years of life, while an 80-year-old can still add three.

PRO TIP

Don't make it a diet: make it a lifestyle change by discovering the foods in the Mediterranean Diet that you like and enjoy. Keep variety in mind so you can sustain these dietary changes for years.

It's Achievable

Starting small leads to a significant impact. By replacing butter with olive oil, white bread with whole wheat, and adding brown rice to your meals, **you can gain a quick two points on the quiz.**

Drinking about one gallon of water daily is associated with reduced mortality from cardiovascular disease, chronic conditions, and some cancers. Proper hydration helps maintain healthy blood viscosity and circulation, supports kidney function to filter toxins efficiently, and reduces strain on the heart, all of which contribute to better overall health.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HEALTHY EATING LIFESTYLES FOR MEN, VISIT:

WWW.MENSHEALTHNETWORK.ORG/HEALTHYLIVING

[5] PUBLIC LIBRARY OF SCIENCE

Lifestyle #3:

Finding Balance

Stress is an inevitable part of life, but chronic stress can have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health. Effective stress management is crucial for maintaining a healthy lifestyle and improving overall well-being for men. Many experts equate prolonged periods of stress to the health impacts created by smoking:

- High levels of stress for prolonged periods ARE roughly equal to smoking ten cigarettes a day.
- Sitting for more than eight hours a day is equivAlent to 12 cigarettes per day.
- Prolonged lonEliness can be as harmful to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is linked to a higher risk of mortality.

Stress Damages Your DNA

Stress isn't just something that feels uncomfortable; it impacts your DNA over time. Imagine your DNA as a book, with each page containing vital information about your health. Stress accelerates the process of aging by shortening telomeres, the protective caps at the end of your chromosomes. These telomeres are like page protectors, keeping your story intact. Chronic stress speeds up the flipping of these pages, causing damage that can lead to chronic illnesses. Studies show that shortened telomeres are linked to conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. Additionally, stress hormones like cortisol, when elevated for prolonged periods, disrupt immune function and increase inflammation, further compounding health risks. Managing stress protects the integrity of your genetic code, preserving your health and vitality for the long term.

Signs of Chronic Stress

- Fatigue: Feeling exhausted, even after getting eight hours of sleep.
- Sleeping disturbances: Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early
- Headaches or muscle tension: Experiencing frequent headaches, neck pain, or muscle aches.
- Digestive issues: Constipation, diarrhea, or heartburn.
- Weakened immune system: Getting sick more often.
- Irritability or mood swings: Feeling more easily annoyed or experiencing frequent mood changes.
- Anxiety or worry: Constant feelings of anxiety or fear.
- Difficulty concentrating: Struggling to focus or complete tasks.
- Feeling overwhelmed or helpless: in balancing your responsibilities.
- Loss of interest in activities: Finding it difficult to enjoy things you used to enjoy.

Lifestyle #3:

Finding Balance: Relaxation Tips

Time in Nature

How to start: Spend 20 minutes outdoors, even in your backyard each day. Take a walk, sit on a bench, or observe the natural world around you.

Why: A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that spending time in nature can reduce stress hormones, improve mood, and boost the immune system.

Goal: If a man spends at least two hours in nature per week, he will be more likely to report improved mental health and overall well-being. [6]

Hobby or Creative Outlet

How to start: Explore a new hobby or revisit an old one that brings joy. This could be anything from painting, writing, playing an instrument, or gardening.

Why: Engaging in enjoyable activities reduces stress, boosts self-esteem, and provides a sense of accomplishment. [7]

Goal: Aim for at least 30 minutes per day. You'll notice reduced stress, improved mood, and a greater sense of purpose.

[6] UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Lifestyle #3:

Finding Balance

Quality Time with Loved Ones

How to start: Schedule a weekly "quality time" activity with family or friends. This could be anything from going for a walk to playing a game or simply talking. Engaging in these activities strengthens bonds and provides emotional support, which is key to maintaining mental well-being.

Why: Research has shown that strong social connections are essential for mental health and longevity. A study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that having strong social relationships can reduce the risk of premature death by up to 50 percent.

Goal: Spending quality time with loved ones at least once a week, improves mood, reduces stress, and creates a stronger sense of belonging.

[7] JOURNAL OF POSITIVE PHSYCOLOGY

Mindfulness and Meditation

How to start: Begin with a guided meditation app or online resource for five to 10 minutes daily. Start with a simple technique like focused attention meditation. That's when you find a quiet space, close your eyes, and focus on your breath. Notice the sensations of your breath as it enters and exits your body. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breath.

Why: Countless studies show that mindfulness meditation can reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance cognitive function.

Goal: Practice mindfulness and meditation for 15 minutes daily for at least four weeks and note stress levels at the start and the end of the month.

Sleep Hygiene

How to start: Establish a consistent sleep schedule, create a relaxing bedtime routine, and optimize your sleep environment by asking yourself, "How can I get 10% more comfortable?"

Why: Poor sleep quality can contribute to stress, anxiety, and decreased cognitive function. A study by the National Sleep Foundation found that men who slept fewer than six hours per night had a 48% increased risk of heart disease and a 23% increase in type 2 diabetes.

Goal: Men sleep fewer hours and are 3x more likely to have sleep apnea. Individual needs vary but aim for seven to nine hours and consult a healthcare professional to identify any issues.

To learn more about healthy eating lifestyles for men, visit:

www.MensHealthNetwork.org/Balance

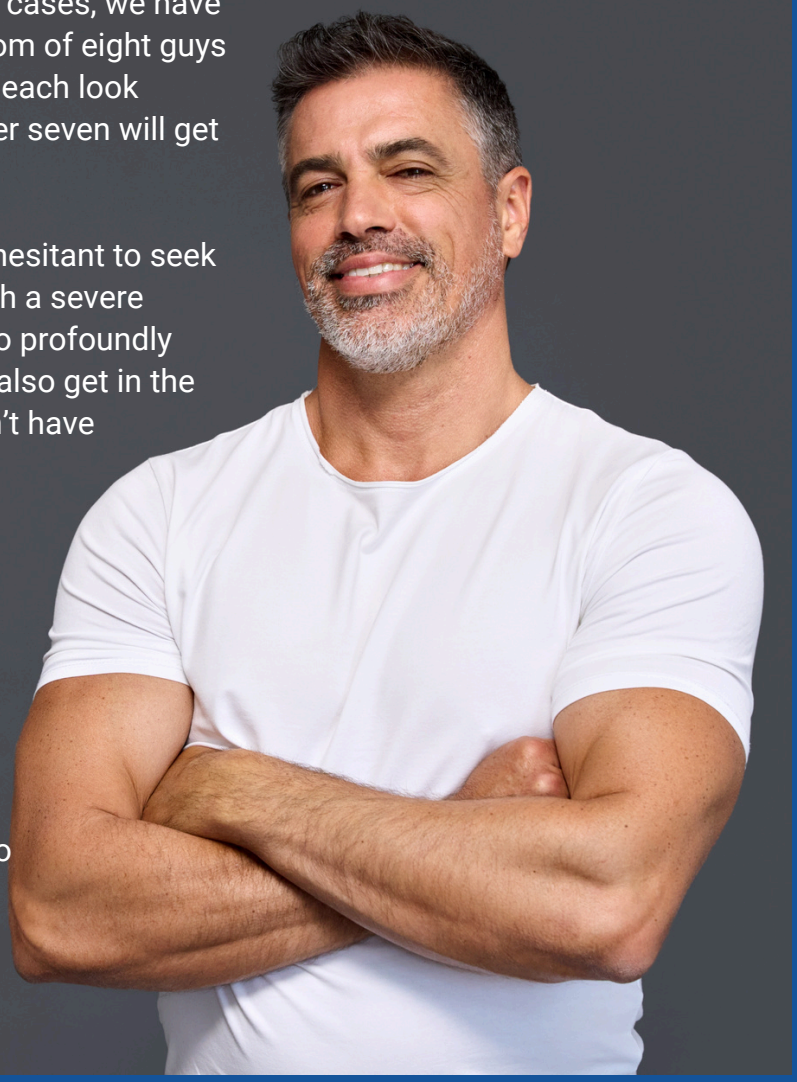
Lifestyle #4:

Build a Team of Healthcare Providers

Regrettably, men tend to avoid the doctor. In some cases, we have an invulnerability complex. A doctor could tell a room of eight guys that one of them will get prostate cancer, and they each look around the room and wonder which one of the other seven will get it. It's been ingrained in us for generations.

Sometimes, men avoid a doctor because they are hesitant to seek medical attention or fearful of being diagnosed with a severe illness. Busy schedules and work-life demands also profoundly impact whether we go to the doctor. Finally, costs also get in the way, as about one in five men are uninsured or don't have enough insurance.

However, avoiding regular check-ups and staying on top of appointments can lead to missed opportunities for early detection of diseases that can be more effectively treated when caught early. For example, conditions like heart disease and diabetes often develop without noticeable symptoms. In fact, studies have shown that men who engage in routine screenings are more likely to live longer and healthier lives, as early detection of health risks often leads to better outcomes. Despite the challenges, the benefits of screening and regular check-ups are undeniable.



- **Prostate cancer**: Men diagnosed with localized disease (cancer that hasn't spread beyond the prostate) have a 5-year survival rate of nearly 100%.
- **Colon Cancer**: Early detection of colon cancer can increase survival rates by over 90%.
- **Skin Cancer:** Survival is 99 percent through regular skin exams that can help identify and treat skin cancers early.
- **Heart Disease**: Managing blood pressure and cholesterol can reduce stroke and heart disease by 30%.
- **Diabetes**: Intensive blood sugar control can reduce the risk of death by 50%. [8]
- **Chronic Kidney Disease**: Early detection can reduce or stop progression to kidney failure by 50%.

[8] NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE

Lifestyle #4:

Build a Team of Healthcare Providers

Often at our parents' insistence, many of us as boys went to an annual physical almost every year. However, as adults, regular medical check-ups often fall by the wayside. This trend is concerning, especially considering that **nearly 30% of patients did not see a primary care physician between 2016 and 2022** (when men's lifespans reached a 30-year low). Establishing and maintaining a relationship with a trusted provider is more than just a health formality; it's a critical factor in longevity.

As we age, building a comprehensive healthcare team —including specialists like cardiologists, urologists, and gastroenterologists—ensures that we have the expert support needed to navigate the complexities of health in our later years. Think of this team as your personal health roster...

The Top 10 Doctors for Every Guy over 40

Primary Care Physician (PCP) – *The Manager*
Your go-to doctor for annual checkups, routine screenings, and overall health management.

Cardiologist – *The Heart Coach*
Helps prevent and manage heart disease, the leading cause of death for men.

Urologist – *The Plumbing Expert*
Screens for prostate cancer, treats urinary issues, and monitors testosterone levels.

Gastroenterologist – *The Gut Checker*
Performs colonoscopies and diagnoses digestive issues like acid reflux and IBS.

Dermatologist – *The Skin Scout*
Detects and treats skin cancer, especially crucial for men with high sun exposure.

Ophthalmologist – *The Eye Guy*
Prevents vision loss by screening for glaucoma, cataracts, and macular degeneration.

Endocrinologist – *The Hormone Regulator*
Manages diabetes, thyroid issues, and low testosterone that impact energy and metabolism.

Orthopedic Specialist – *The Joint Fixer*
Helps keep bones and joints strong, treating arthritis, back pain, and mobility issues.

Therapist – *The Mental Health Coach*
Supports emotional well-being, stress management, and mental resilience as life evolves.

Dentist – *The Mouth Mechanic*
Maintains oral health, which is linked to heart health and overall well-being.

Men's Health Network

2.5 YEARS!

You can cut your personal lifespan gap by almost half just by seeing a doctor every year. Studies have shown that **men who attend regular medical check-ups annually live an average of 2.5 years longer**.

GOAL

Get a primary care doctor and calendar in a yearly check-up

Five Fool-Proof Tips to Getting a Doctor

1- **Find a doc you trust**: An excellent doctor-patient relationship can make it easier to discuss health concerns. Studies show that patients who like their doctor are far more likely to go to appointments and live longer.

2- **Involve a loved one or a friend**: Ask a friend or family member to go with you to your appointment or to hold you accountable for going.

3- **Cost**: Explore affordable care options and available subsidies for healthcare. Follow this link to see resources for your state: https://www.healthcare.gov/marketplace-in-your-state/

4- **Track progress**: Know your numbers. There are plenty of free apps or use a notebook to keep track of your numbers like blood pressure, cholesterol, blood counts, and PSA.

5- **Celebrate Progress**: Come up with reward yourself for taking steps to improve your health through early detection.

Resources

Find a Healthcare Center: Search for information about the closest health centers closest to you at https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/.

Learn more about screenings and prevention: www.MensHealthNetwork.org/screening-programs

Lifestyle #5:

Don’t Smoke and Limit Substances

Whether it’s smoking, drinking alcohol, or drugs, substance abuse is a deadly disease that can have devastating consequences for individuals and their families. It's a complex condition involving physical and psychological factors and can be extremely challenging to overcome alone.

Consider the hidden dangers of addiction:

- Increased CHRONIC DISEASE RISK such as heart disease, liver disease, stroke, and cancer. For example, **smokers are over 23 times more likely** to get lung cancer than nonsmokers, double the risk of bladder and pancreatic cancer, and are at increased risk for 15 other cancers including prostate cancer and ultimately die about 10 years earlier than non-smokers.

- About one-third of traffic fatalities are related to alcohol use.

- About **two-thirds of overdose deaths** in the U.S. are men.

- Impaired Cognitive function, such as brain damage, memory loss, and cancer. For example, chronic opioid use can cause a **20 percent** reduction in verbal memory performance.

- Relationship and Family problems lead to isolation and loneliness. For example, alcohol and drug abuse increases the chance of divorce by **50 percent**.

- Financial difficulties like job loss and economic problems. Substance abusers are **four times more likely** to have financial issues.

- Substance abuse is a major contributor to mental health issues, with individuals who misuse drugs being twice as likely to experience depression and anxiety disorders.

Lifespan and Substance Abuse Disorder

Heavy drinkers (consuming 15 or more drinks per week) **live about five fewer years** than moderate and non-drinkers.

Quitting smoking adds **10 years or more** to lifespans. Quitting before 50 reduces odds of getting lung cancer by 90%.

Men who are opioid users by 18 have a life expectancy of 47.5, **nearly 30 fewer years** than the current average lifespan.

Steps toward Breaking Free of Addiction

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance abuse, there is hope. Effective treatment options are available to help. Here's what to know:

- Join a support group like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. These are free, easily accessible groups with access to others who have been through similar experiences and can provide valuable support and encouragement.
- Seek professional help: Qualified healthcare providers can assess your needs and recommend Medically Assisted Treatment (MATs) and/or psychological support.
- Build a strong support network by surrounding yourself with positive, supportive people who are pursuing the same health goals as you.
- Seek professional help: Qualified healthcare providers can assess your needs and recommend Medically Assisted Treatment (MATs) and/or psychological support.
- Develop healthy coping mechanisms: Practice new ways to manage stress, find balance, and hone your response to triggers that make you want to pick up and use. For example, have a plan if you find yourself somewhere where a substance is being used that you feel uncomfortable around.
- Create a daily routine: Structure your day around healthy, fulfilling activities that support your recovery, such as exercise, hobbies, or spending time with supportive friends and family. For example, if you find that evenings are particularly challenging, plan a relaxing activity—like reading, cooking, or taking a walk—to replace old habits.

Lifestyle #6:

Support Networks Have Health Benefits

IIt's science. When we feel loved, cared about, and connected, our bodies release oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin hormones. These hormones boost our immune systems and reduce cortisol, a stress hormone that contributes to weight gain, high blood pressure, and potentially even cancer.

Social support networks are crucial to longevity. Research has shown that strong social connections can increase expected lifespans by as much as 50 percent. [9] For example, a 60-year-old with limited mortality risk factors who is expected to live another 14 years may instead live 21 years due to the protective effects of a supportive network of family and friends. In fact, studies have found that social relationships can be as important as maintaining physical health for extending life. [10]

- **Reduced Stress**: Social support significantly reduces stress levels, which is linked to a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, and other chronic illnesses.
- **Improved Mental Health**: Strong social connections help prevent depression and anxiety, both of which have been associated with increased mortality.
- **Healthier Behaviors**: People with strong social ties are likelier to engage in healthy behaviors like regular exercise, healthy eating, and avoiding harmful substances.
- **Early Detection of Health Problems**: Social networks encourage individuals to seek medical attention when necessary, leading to earlier diagnosis and treatment of health issues.

[9] PUBLIC LIBRARY OF SCIENCE
[10] JOURNAL OF BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE

Friendship Recession

We are living through a friend recession. According to the Survey Center on American Life, our friendship groups have become smaller over the past 30 years, and the lack of close confidants has risen significantly. The deficit is starker among men. In 1990, **40 percent of men said they had ten or more close friends. Today, it's about 15 percent**.

PRO TIP

Keep a journal or use a mobile app to record your social interactions. Do a quick self-assessment of your mood, stress levels, satisfaction, and/or actions toward healthy lifestyle choices. Expanding your circle by joining groups or clubs, attending social events, or using technology to meet people with shared interests is vital. Most importantly, expanding your circle requires patience.

Health Social Networks Boost Your Well-Being

if we surround ourselves with people who care about us and those who have healthy behaviors, it benefits a part of our subconscious called physiological regulation. That means we're more likely to maintain our blood pressure, exercise more, eat more fruits and vegetables, avoid harmful substances, and see the doctor regularly.

GOAL

Increase the number of friends by 25% over the next year

A Tip for Getting Started

Making friends isn't easy but it happens through spending time with others.

Write down a list of people in your life and under each of their names, write a quality or two that you want to develop and see in yourself. Those qualities might be confidence, positivity, or wisdom. For example, you might write down, "John: reliable and sense of humor." make time to spend with each one of these people.

LEVEL UP

1.**Prioritize communication**. It's essential to express appreciation, actively listen, and know there will always be conflict. Aim to resolve it by understanding differences (sometimes this means letting go).

2.**Do an activity**. Having shared experiences builds vulnerability-based trust.

3.**Give support and get support**. We all lead busy lives, but taking the initiative to reach out to others and showing empathy for another's perspective and emotions is key.

Get Involved with Men's Health Network

MHN
Men's Health Network©

Men's Health Network (MHN) believes in closing the lifespan gap by stopping premature male deaths and enhancing their overall health. We are passionately dedicated to improving the lives of men and their families in the communities they live in by providing support, education, and advocacy.

Closing this gap takes all of us — men and the families that care about them. We can end the diseases and conditions that keep all of us from living healthy and fulfilling lives.

Together, we will build and unite a national network of supporters and like-minded organizational partners to identify the causes of this gap, the solutions needed, and how best to work together to meet the unmet needs to do it effectively.

We will cut the lifespan gap in half by the end of the decade by empowering men to change their health-seeking behaviors when faced with cardiovascular diseases, cancers, mental illnesses, and chronic conditions and develop healthy lifestyle habits. By reducing mortality in each of these areas, we will save countless lives and keep families together.

Men's Health Network is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations to MHN are tax deductible. Our federal tax ID number is 52-1855419.

JOIN NOW

Become an MHN Ambassador Today

Consider becoming a Men's Health Network ambassador. You can help raise awareness about men's health issues in your community and give a voice to advocacy initiatives that improve access to care for men and their families. Go to:

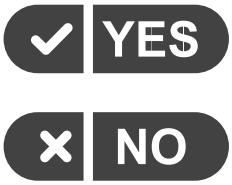
www.MensHealthNetwork.org/GetInvolved

DONATE

Every $25 donation puts this guide and other materials in front of the men who need it most. Go to:

www.Menshealthnetwork.com/Donate

Add Up Your Results...



Are you moderately exercising for 150 minutes or vigorously exercising for 75 each week?

Are you following eight or nine points of the Mediterranean Diet?

Are you accomplishing three out of five of the relaxation tip recommendations?

Do you have a primary care provider and have an annual check-up scheduled?

Are you a non-smoker and consuming two or fewer drinks per day?

Have you a plan to make more friends in the coming year?

How many did you answer "yes" to?

Share these results with your medical provider.

The Gap Guide

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Disclaimer

Men's Health Network provides general health information and resources but does not offer medical advice. The information provided is not a substitute for professional medical care, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult with your healthcare provider for medical advice and regular checkups.