

Men's health: What are the stats?

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Quick. What's the first thing that pops into your mind when you hear the term "Men's Health?"

Prostate cancer? Erectile dysfunction?

You're not alone. Both of these health issues have been getting a lot of press these days. Aging baby boomers, celebrities who have struggled with the diseases, large research projects dedicated to prevention, early detection and new exciting treatments have given these men's health issues prominence in today's media.

And the statistics bear out its importance:

- For every 100 men, 12 will develop prostate cancer in their lifetime
- 3 or 4 will die from it
- As many as 30 men suffer from some form of sexual difficulty, but only 5 or 6 will get help

Disturbing stuff, right? But prostate cancer and erectile dysfunction are only part of the men's health story. There's a much bigger picture. Right now, Canadian men are:

- 70% more likely than women to die from heart disease
- 50% more likely to die of complications from diabetes
- 40% more likely to die from cancer
- More than twice as likely to die from liver disease.
- 3 times more likely to commit suicide.
- 84% more likely to die from arterial disease.

When it comes to prevention and early detection, men's health has often taken a back seat to women's health. Yet, research has shown that compared to women, men are more likely to:

- lead less healthy lifestyles
- put off routine checkups
- delay seeking medical advice for a health problem
- not have a regular doctor and/or health insurance

Nobody likes to visit the doctor, not even women. But men are far less likely to do so than women. And that hang-up could be one of the main reasons men's life expectancy is coming up short by almost four years, when compared with women's life expectancy.

And no matter where you look in the world, women generally live longer. This begs the question, why?

Why do women live longer?

And what are men doing wrong?

The good news is that men's health is being talked about more openly. It's become an important issue to everyone - not just men. And for good reason. Men are dying. Young. Younger than women. And the sad thing is - men could prevent their premature deaths had they taken a more active role in their health in their early adult years and as they age.

The first step? Admit you're at risk.

What is men's health?

Men don't like to talk about it. That's a fact. But men's health issues — while often overlapping with women's concerns — have unique aspects that men must understand. So let's define it. Let's give ourselves a working definition we can own. Borrowing from the Australian Men's Health Network we can define men's health as:

“Conditions or diseases that are unique to men, that are more prevalent in men, that are more serious among men, for which the risk factors are different for men, or for which different interventions are required for men.”

So what conditions or diseases are unique to men? Three readily come to mind: prostate cancer, testicular cancer and erectile dysfunction. Are there others? What conditions are more prevalent and serious in men than women? Let's look at the numbers – see Table 1.

Table 1. Leading causes of death in men and women, 2008

	Men	Women
Ages 15 – 24		
Unintentional injuries	675	235
Suicide	344	119
Homicide	141	20
Cancer	91	69
Diseases of the heart	44	9
Congenital abnormalities	21	21
Cerebrovascular diseases	7	7

	Men	Women
Ages 25 – 44		
Unintentional injuries	1314	403
Suicide	989	292
Cancer	711	999
Diseases of the heart	512	192
Homicide	177	29
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	108	67
HIV disease	99	40
Diabetes mellitus	83	59
Cerebrovascular disease	75	74

	Men	Women
Ages 45 – 64		
Cancer	9129	8578
Cardiovascular diseases	5369	1542
Unintentional injuries	1604	654
Suicide	1032	415
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	917	396
Diabetes mellitus	800	403
Cerebrovascular disease	637	513
Chronic lower respiratory disease	457	409
Other infections	374	284
Kidney diseases	133	87
HIV diseases	128	-

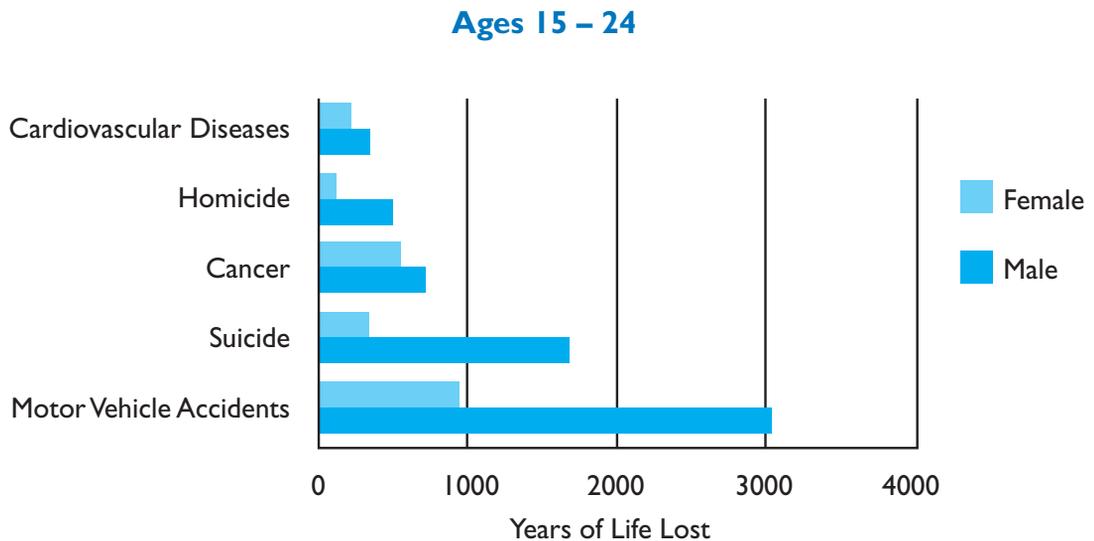
	Men	Women
Ages 65 - 84		
Cancer	21,682	17,740
Cardiovascular diseases	13,374	9203
Chronic lower respiratory disease	3422	2711
Cerebrovascular diseases	2996	3035
Diabetes mellitus	2230	1794
Unintentional injuries	1453	1086
Other infections	1014	1249
Kidney diseases	996	781
Alzheimer's disease	933	1488
Parkinsons disease	540	349
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	435	194
Aortic diseases	220	-

Taken from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/84-215-x/2011001/tbl/t003-eng.pdf>

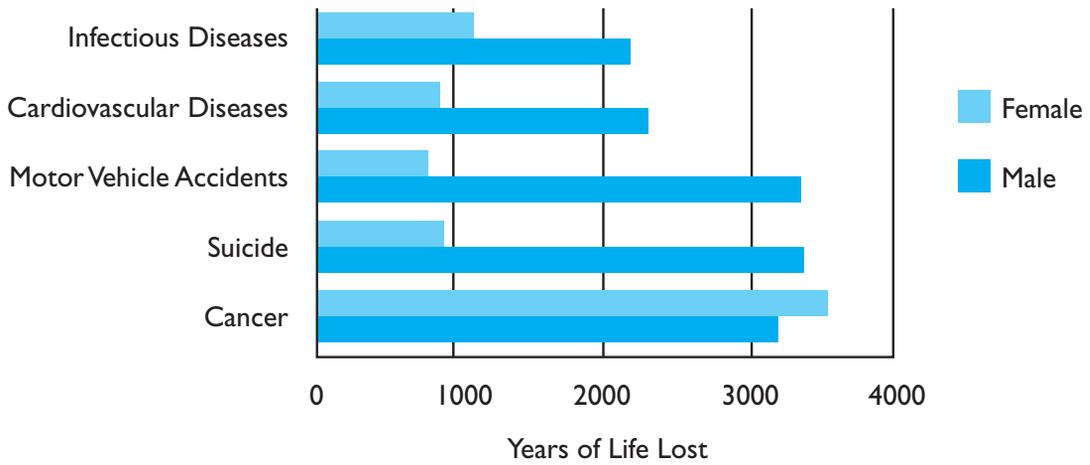
As the numbers show, unintentional injuries, suicide and homicide for men in age groups 15 – 24 and 25 – 44 are significantly higher than women. Cardiovascular diseases (heart) and cerebrovascular diseases (stroke), present much differently in men than in women in two of the age categories later in life. As well, although prostate and testicular cancer are unique to men, the overall cancer rates between men and women are about the same across all age groups, given that women have their own unique cancers (breast, ovary, cervix).

This information is useful, but does not explain the life expectancy gap between men and women. We need to look at the difference in death rates and the age at which death occurs. The next set of figures may help. These include an index called PYLL (Potential Years of Life Lost) which indicates the “number of years of life ‘lost’ when a person dies ‘prematurely’ from any cause, before age 75.”³ This index helps us understand why there is a life expectancy difference between the two sexes. The PYLL not only lists the rate of death but also the age of death – this points us to ways we can improve life expectancy for men. Let us look at the following graphs and the leading causes of death based on PYLL, 2006.

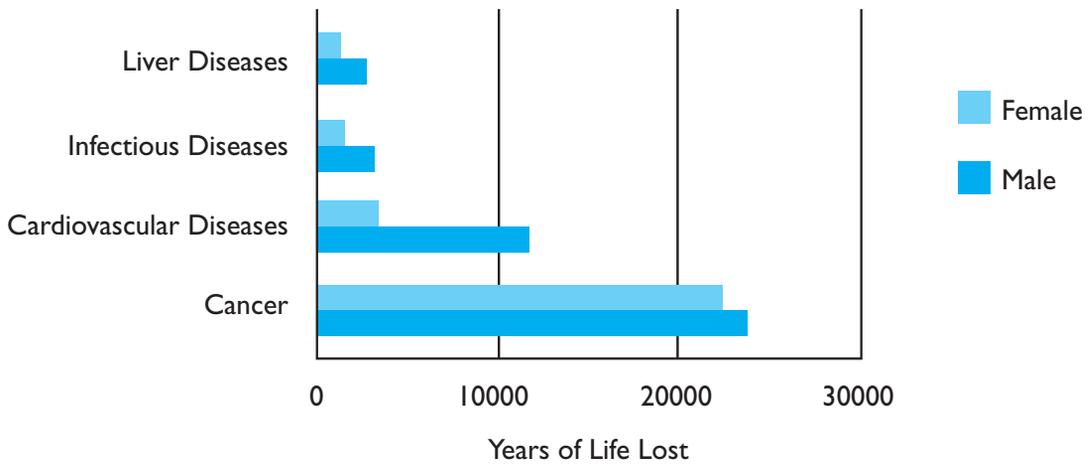
Let us look at the following graphs and the leading causes of death based on PYLL, 2006.⁴



Age group 25 - 44



Age group 45 - 74



What do you notice about the graphs? Especially across the first two age groups?

We see that one of the biggest killers of men are motor vehicle accidents, which in most cases have very little to do with illness. In the youngest age category 15 – 24, another non-health issue, homicide, is one of the top five killers of men. Cardiovascular disease (i.e., heart attack and stroke) makes the top five in all age categories.

When you look at all the diseases and conditions across all categories, you'll notice something else: each and every one of these conditions is, to some degree, preventable.

So, if starting tomorrow, men improved their health by adopting preventive health measures, would they live longer? Maybe.

What causes men to die younger than women, on average?

Researchers have described three reasons: (1) Biology; (2) Environment; and (3) Behaviour

Biology

This includes physical characteristics that are unique to men: hormones, muscular strength and genetics.

1. Men do not have as much estrogen as women. Higher levels of estrogen in women, until the end of their childbearing years, protect their hearts and lungs. Also, men tend to react much more aggressively when angered and have poor eating habits, such as more salt in their diet. All of these acting together increase the incidence of deadly heart disease for men, especially younger men, and decrease their overall life expectancy. (When women have heart attacks, they are less likely to be deadly but more likely to result in chronic problems.)
2. Men's greater degree of muscular strength might lead them to engage in physically risky occupations, thus contributing to increased rates of death.
3. Men's brains are genetically determined towards greater risk-taking related to higher levels of sensation seeking. This inherited personality trait would increase men's vulnerability to injury through high-risk work or leisure activities.

Environment

This category involves higher exposure to risks from the environment – whether the physical or cultural environment.

1. **Work life:** Men are more likely to be employed in jobs where risk of accidental injury is higher. Male dominated, physically challenging and dangerous occupations include the armed forces, fire department, law enforcement, industrial manufacturing and construction work

- 97% of workplace deaths in Canada between 1993 and 2005 were male.
 - Young men aged 25 to 29 years account for the largest number of occupational injury deaths.
 - Based on the most conservative estimates, 137 workers die each day from occupational diseases and an estimated 130 of these are male.
2. **Social network:** This includes incidents or situations (i.e. malnutrition, poor diet, toxin exposure) that have an effect on disease and death in a man's life. An example might be men of lower education and economic status have fewer options for career choices and therefore may face greater pressure to take high-risk jobs.

Behaviour

This includes ways in which men act and behave that raise the risk of serious health problems and death. Risky behaviours include participating in dangerous sports, heavy or binge drinking, ignoring the signs of a health problem and not planning regular health checkups. Five patterns exist:

1. **Risky operation of motor vehicles.** Men's higher degree of physical risk extends to driving a car or anything motorized. It's not because men drive more, it's because men tend to drive faster and more recklessly.
2. **Alcohol abuse.** Men are two to three times more likely to have a serious alcohol problem than women.¹³ Alcohol is a risk factor for a number of serious diseases and death, including cancer, diabetes and liver disease. It has been shown to be a major factor in deaths from car accidents and suicide. The rate of global deaths because of alcohol is more than 5 times higher for men (6.3%) than for women (1.1%).
3. **Smoking.** Men are more likely to smoke than women. Smoking is a risk factor for a number of serious diseases. In developed countries smoking is responsible for 25% of all male deaths and 7% of all female deaths.
4. **Unhealthy eating habits.** Given all the evidence that a healthy diet can reduce the risk of disease and death, men don't make the effort to eat as well as women. Men eat too few fruits and vegetables, and consume far too much salt.
5. **Not going to see a doctor.** Men, especially between 18 and 40, make fewer visits to health practitioners than women. For many men, their health is only ever addressed when something is really wrong. A trip to the doctor's office is usually made out of necessity, very rarely is it self-initiated or preventive. Men just don't do checkups. Because of this men are missing the opportunity for early detection of health problems and recommendations for prevention.

What is the Impact of Men's Health?

Men's health has a profound effect on not only the individual male, but on his family, friends, workplace and society.

- The life expectancy of the average Canadian male is 78.3 years – fully three years and nine months less than the average female.
- The “health expectancy” of the average male—the age at which a man becomes physically or mentally unhealthy, and dependent upon others—is a mere 65 years.

This means that men can look forward to 11 years of poor health and disability before finally passing away. This is called the “gap” between health expectancy and life expectancy. Sadly, large numbers of women over the age of 65 fall below the poverty line when their husbands die first. It also means that at the age of 65, on average, the role of men changes and they become more of a potential burden on their spouses and families.

- Resources, such as money and time, are now dedicated to health related concerns
- Stress and anxiety increase, thereby increasing the potential for more health issues
- The golden years of golf, gardening, travel, visits to the cottage, pursuing a favourite hobby, playing with grandchildren are all reduced or taken away because of poor health.

For society, the premature death of men means a loss in the workforce. As men age, their tendency to avoid seeking medical advice or preventive counselling for potentially serious illnesses, results in a tremendous burden on our health care system. As men tend to have longer years of illness, the burden is compounded.

Addressing the risk factors and improving the quality of your health as you age is very important for men. Men's health isn't just a catch phrase and it's not just about prostate health or sexual function. It's life and death. Starting and building a family is hugely rewarding. ***The best insurance policy a man can get to protect and enjoy his family is not from a company, but from being healthy.***

Imagine

Imagine being able to add 10 years to the middle of your life – 10 healthy, quality years. Your 50s, 60s and 70s become much more enjoyable. The aches, pains and illnesses are less. Your mind is still sharp. You are more productive at work. Your sex life is better. Your energy level is good. You're not short of breath, and you can still bend over and clip your own toe nails at age 65. Small things, but it's about independence. It's life. *Imagine* being healthy and productive well into your 80s. *Imagine* how much more time you would have with family and loved ones. *Imagine* how you could serve your community, your city, your country with 10 more good years. It's worth it, right?.

What is the Men's Health Landscape in Canada?

Let's consider the women's health movement. During the 1990s in Canada, six centres of excellence were created for women's health; they have created a health infrastructure to meet the unique health needs of women. Women have taken charge of their health. And in so doing, they have seen tremendous advances in policy decisions, research, education and treatment options.

It's 2012 and Canada has no national men's health strategy. No centres of excellence. No lobbyists, comprehensive media campaigns. No celebrity endorsements. Australia, Ireland, Brazil and the USA have all recognized the importance of having a national men's health strategy. And they're not shy about what they want to achieve. Australia plans to make their countrymen the healthiest in the world by 2020.

As Canadian men, shouldn't we want the same thing? To be the healthiest we can be? In late 2009, the Men's Health Initiative of British Columbia (MHIBC) was founded as an umbrella organization to begin the work of improving men's health across the province. A great deal of work has been accomplished by MHIBC, but it is only the tip of the iceberg in Canada. Recognizing and building upon that need, a new organization is being created that will champion men's health issues across Canada and figure out how to get men to listen to, and respond to, appropriate health messages.

How can men improve their health?

What we know is that much of what kills men early is preventable. Men can make a difference by changing their behaviour. Imagine making ten small changes in your lifestyle and adding ten healthy years to the middle of your life and decreasing the 10 year gap between health and life expectancies at the end of your life. That's twenty years of better health for you, your family and society. Effective change in men's health will not happen overnight. Organizations, such as MHIBC, are leading the way in Canada, but the first step in that change begins with you.

Here are 10 small changes you can do right now:

1. **Lose weight, especially belly fat.** Calculate your body mass index to see if your weight falls into a healthy range. Measure your waist. For men a measurement of over 102cm (40 inches), or 90 cm (35 inches) for Chinese & South Asian men means you need to lose fat.
2. **Eat more vegetables & fruits, and reduce salt & sugar.** These are the most important things men can do to improve their diets. Aim for five to 10 servings of fruit and vegetables a day. Reduce salt by eating less packaged foods and having fewer meals in restaurants. Give up sugary sodas and make desserts a special treat.
3. **Be more physically active.** Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity every day. You can go to the gym, ride your bike, take a yoga class or participate in any sport you enjoy. Even things like gardening, walking and household chores are beneficial.
4. **Quit smoking.** We all know that smoking is bad for us. Unfortunately 20% of men still smoke. Changing long-term habits can be hard. However, there are resources and support to help you quit.

5. **Check your blood pressure.** 20% of Canadians have high blood pressure, but almost half of them don't know it because there are no symptoms. Men of all ages can have high blood pressure.
 - 120 over 80 is normal
 - 120 – 139 over 80 – 89 is a bit higher than recommended but still in the normal range
 - 140 over 90 is considered high
6. **Check your cholesterol.** Many men don't know they have high cholesterol. Ask your doctor about cholesterol testing, especially if you are over 40. It's a simple blood test.
7. **Watch out for diabetes.** Diabetes in men is on the rise and it increases your risk of many health problems. Prevent diabetes with a healthy diet and lifestyle.
8. **Drink alcohol in moderation.** How much is too much? For most men it's more than two drinks per day and 14 drinks per week. If you already have high blood pressure it's even more important to reduce alcohol intake.
9. **Take good care of your head too.** Men overlook mental health as part of their health concerns. Depression and suicide are prominent in men, as are stress and anxiety but men are reluctant to seek help for themselves. Participate in stress reduction activities such as meditation, yoga, or any exercise or sport you enjoy. And don't be timid about seeking assistance. Your doctor is one resource among many.
10. **Manage your health.** Men are good at taking care of others – don't forget about yourself. If you don't have a family doctor – find one. Talk to your doctor about any health concerns and health risks. Know your family history and share it with your doctor.

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CHECKLISTS FOR MALE HEALTH

Age 20-39

Blood Pressure	Yearly
Blood Tests & Urinalysis	3 Years
Eye Health	2 Years
Oral Health	Yearly
Physical Exam	3 Years
Rectal Exam	Yearly
Skin Health	Self Checks
STDs	Yearly
Testicular Health	Self Checks
Tetanus Booster	10 Years
TB Skin Test	5 Years

Age 40-49

Blood Pressure	Yearly
Blood Tests & Urinalysis	3 Years
Eye Health	2 Years
Oral Health	Yearly
Physical Exam	3 Years
Rectal Exam	Yearly
Skin Health	Self Checks
STDs	Yearly
Testicular Health	Self Checks
Tetanus Booster	10 Years
TB Skin Test	5 Years

Age 50+

Blood Pressure	Yearly
Blood Tests & Urinalysis	3 Years
Eye Health	2 Years
Oral Health	Yearly
Physical Exam	3 Years
Rectal Exam	Yearly
Skin Health	Self Checks
STDs	Yearly
Testicular Health	Self Checks
Tetanus Booster	10 Years
TB Skin Test	5 Years

These MHIBC check lists are based on your age and are meant to act as a guideline. Talk to your doctor to make sure your specific health needs are addressed and managed.

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