

Doctors' advice for dad on Father's Day

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(Medical Xpress) -- Father's Day brings to mind one of the most important things about being a good dad - staying healthy for his children's sake.

But on average men die younger than women and have higher [mortality rates](#) from [heart disease](#), cancer, [stroke](#) and [AIDS](#).

And men are much less likely than women to see their [doctors](#).

"Many men are simply afraid of what their doctor might find," said Dr. Aaron Michelfelder, a [family doctor](#) at Loyola University Health System. "But ignoring a problem doesn't make it go away. Indeed, the earlier we diagnose such conditions as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and cancer, the more successfully we can treat them."

Michelfelder urges his patients to see him at least once a year. While there has been debate over the benefits of an annual physical exam, a yearly visit at a minimum provides an opportunity to conduct appropriate screening tests.

There also has been discussion about various screening tests.

Recommendations vary on exams such as PSA screening for prostate cancer. Michelfelder offers the following advice, based on guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and other health organizations.

Body Mass Index. This is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. A BMI under 18.5 is underweight. Normal is 18.5 to 24.9. Overweight is 25 to 29.9 and obese is 30 and above. BMI should be checked yearly. (You can calculate your own BMI by searching online for "BMI calculator" and plugging in your height and weight.)

Colorectal cancer. Men should be screened beginning at age 50. The gold standard is a colonoscopy. A doctor uses a slender, lighted tube to examine the entire colon. A colonoscopy can find and remove precancerous growths called polyps. If a colonoscopy is normal, it's good for 10 years. Other screening exams include a yearly fecal occult blood test (which can find blood in the stool) or, every five years, a fecal blood test combined with an exam called a sigmoidoscopy, which examines the lower part of the colon.

Cardiovascular. Men ages 45 to 79 can take one baby aspirin a day to help prevent heart attacks.

Dental checkups. See a dentist at least once a year -- ideally every six months. Bad teeth can affect other parts of the body. For example, dental disease is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Diabetes. Men with risk factors such as a family history of diabetes, being overweight or experiencing diabetic symptoms should be screened with a fasting blood test. This test measures the amount of a sugar called glucose in your blood. Normal is less than 100 milligrams per deciliter; 101 to 125 is prediabetes and above 125 suggests diabetes.

Hearing. If a patient or his spouse reports a hearing problem, or if the patient works in a job with excessive noise, Michelfelder will order a hearing test.

High blood pressure. Every man 18 or older should have his blood

pressure checked at least once a year.

Cholesterol. Men ages 20 to 35 who have cardiovascular disease risk factors such as diabetes should be screened. After age 35, all men should be screened once every five years if normal, or more often if levels are borderline.

Prostate cancer. Your doctor will assess your risk of developing prostate cancer, and having sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and syphilis. Based on your risk factors, your doctor may recommend further testing.

Abdominal aortic aneurysm. This is a bulge in the large blood vessel that supplies the abdomen and lower body. If it ruptures, it will cause severe bleeding that often is fatal. An aneurysm can be repaired with surgery. Men ages 65 to 75 who have ever smoked should be screened with an ultrasound.

Other conditions. Michelfelder also screens [men](#) for depression, smoking and alcohol abuse and talks to them about controlling their weight, getting enough physical activity and avoiding risky sexual behavior.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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