

Men, make health your goal this year

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(HealthDay)—The new year is the ideal time to focus on your health and one expert has some tips, especially for men, for doing that.

According to Dr. Kevin McVary, director of Loyola Medicine Men's Health Center, in Maywood, Ill., "Men don't always focus on their health and, in fact, men are less likely to see a doctor or utilize health resources, and wait longer than women to seek care. Often, it's a man's spouse or partner who convinces him to see a doctor."

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, "a focus on health is especially important this year," McVary said in a Loyola news release.

"We know that obesity, [heart disease](#), diabetes and a lack of exercise can lead to poorer COVID-19 outcomes. In addition, some men may have stopped eating healthy during the past year, and/or may be consuming more alcohol due to stress. Others may have a condition or concern that they are not seeking treatment for due to the pandemic," McVary explained.

"And yet, lifestyle choices—exercising, eating healthy, not smoking, limiting alcohol consumption and managing stress—combined with preventive care can keep you healthy this year and throughout your lifetime," McVary added. "And it's never too late to start."

McVary offers the following tips:

- **Boost your physical activity.**

Men should exercise 150 minutes each week. "That sounds like a lot of time, but it's not," McVary said. That could be 30 minutes a day, five days a week. And you can spread your activity out during the week.

"Sitting less and moving more is a great start as some [physical activity](#) is better than none," he said. "Adults who sit less and do any amount of moderate-to-vigorous intensity activity gain health benefits."

- **Think about what you eat.**

January is a popular month to start a new diet. "One of the issues with New Year's resolutions is that they often involve sudden, drastic lifestyle changes. It's not easy to turn these changes into [healthy behaviors](#) and to fully adopt them as a regular part of your daily routine. Be careful with fad diets. Instead, make permanent improvements that focus on healthy eating habits and maintaining a healthy weight," McVary said.

A healthy diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat dairy foods. It should also include lean proteins—such as poultry, fish, eggs and nuts—and foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.

- **Visit your primary care physician.**

It's important to schedule an appointment with your doctor. "Concerns about money, not having a primary care physician, inconvenience or stoicism are common excuses, but the reality is that visiting a medical professional can greatly improve your health," McVary said. "And don't just visit your doctor when you're sick. Make a habit of scheduling an annual wellness exam. This ensures that you stay in good health and identify health issues before they become serious."

- **Understand your risk of a heart attack.**

Heart attack risk factors include being male, advanced age, a family history of heart disease, race and ethnicity (Black, Mexican Americans, American Indians and Asian Americans are at highest risk), smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, a sedentary lifestyle, being overweight or obese, diabetes, stress and excessive alcohol consumption.

- **If you're 50 or older, schedule a colonoscopy.**

"Regular screenings are the key to preventing colorectal cancer as they

identify precancerous polyps that can be removed before they become cancerous," McVary said. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends [colorectal cancer](#) screening for men aged 50 to 75. For men age 76 and older, alternative screening tests, including stool tests, flexible sigmoidoscopy or a CT colonography (a virtual colonoscopy), may be recommended.

- **Know the symptoms of prostate cancer, and the pros and cons of screening.**

Prostate cancer screening through a [prostate-specific antigen](#) (PSA) test is available; however, for men aged 55 to 69, the decision to have PSA screening means weighing the benefits of cutting rates of advanced disease and death against potential harms of screening and treatment. "A PSA test may result in a false positive, leading to an unnecessary biopsy or treatment," McVary said.

- **Recognize and manage stress.**

"As with physical symptoms, men tend to downplay or ignore the symptoms of stress, depression or anxiety, and yet ongoing mental health issues can cause sleep, heart and other physical health problems. An annual wellness exam should include an honest discussion about mental [health](#) and sleep quality, as well as strategies for mitigating stress," McVary said.

More information: For more on men's health, head to the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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