

Q&A: Pay attention to symptoms for good men's health

July 27 2023, by Dr. Vikas Mehta



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My husband recently celebrated his 49th birthday. He is generally healthy, and we follow a Mediterranean diet and exercise together several times a week. But he hasn't been to the doctor in years, as we

moved just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Do you think it's necessary for him to have an annual health check at this time or wait until his milestone birthday next year?

ANSWER: As men age, even those accustomed to [good health](#) may encounter symptoms that affect their quality of life. I am a big proponent of establishing care with a general [health](#) specialist and maintaining annual visits to ensure patients can remain as healthy as possible.

Having a well-check visit can help identify your husband's risk for specific conditions and whether there are screenings or tests that could be valuable to ensure he remains healthy. Also, it would provide the opportunity to discuss any early symptoms or areas of concern that your husband—like many men—might not be comfortable discussing with his spouse.

These are the most common symptoms or issues affecting a man's health.

Urological symptoms and sexual health

The need to urinate often can signal prostate or bladder problems and/or diabetes. Painful or otherwise difficult urination also should be followed up on.

Erectile dysfunction, which is difficulty getting or maintaining an erection, is treatable and a good reason to have a cardiac screening. It may be an early sign of heart trouble, as typically, if there are issues with [blood vessels](#) in one part of the body, there are likely issues elsewhere.

A testicular exam is vital to look for lumps and is a good idea for men who have never had one. As many men may not have had anyone other

than their partners look at their sexual organs, ensuring there are no abnormalities is invaluable.

Musculoskeletal health

Exercise can help relieve stress, but if being active is more painful than usual due to musculoskeletal conditions, this is a sign that there may be something else going on.

Are there more aches and pains than usual? Is it taking longer to recover from injuries? A decrease in capacity for exercise often is related to musculoskeletal issues, such as muscle wasting, and inflammatory issues.

Screening for osteoarthritis and [rheumatic diseases](#), such as gout, [psoriatic arthritis](#) and rheumatoid arthritis, may be called for, especially if there is a family history of these.

Respiratory health and sleep

If your husband finds himself becoming fatigued and/or out of breath when exercising or just walking around, or if he has a [chronic cough](#), it is time to get screened. Respiratory conditions, such as adult-onset asthma and COVID-related problems, are among the possibilities that should be reviewed.

Snoring and/or stopping breathing at times during the night can be a sign of sleep apnea and other respiratory problems. A lack of quality sleep is linked to several health problems, such as higher blood pressure, increased stroke risk, memory issues, anxiety, depression, and increased appetite that can lead to diabetes and weight gain.

Ear, nose and throat health

Tinnitus, which is ringing and other noises in the ears; hearing better in one ear than the other; and ear pain are becoming more common as people work from home and use headphones.

Men with chronic sore throats, especially smokers, and/or those with white lesions in their mouths should be checked for throat cancers. With early detection, treatment for head and neck cancers can be successful.

Those with unexplained chronic congestion should be screened for nasal polyps. Sometimes, a feeling that one nostril is harder to breathe out of than the other can be a symptom.

A feeling of constantly needing to clear the throat or something "caught in the throat" can be a sign of gastroesophageal reflux disease.

Mental health

Mental health is a sensitive subject for most people, but it often is overlooked, particularly for men. Whether your husband is in a high-stress profession or not, the current environment is such that it is important to address one's [mental health](#) in addition to physical health.

Additional considerations

Other conditions that I suggest reviewing at an annual checkup include diabetes and cholesterol. Prostate and colon cancer screening may be worthwhile depending on family history of cancers. I always encourage men to bring up anything that is new or different. Often, it may be nothing, but being proactive to remain in optimal health is worthwhile.

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