

By David Qu and Stephan Esser



Health for him

A man's guide to the world of wellbeing

It's said that health is more about choices than chances. It's true. Every day you make thousands of choices that shape your health for today and tomorrow. But do you know what decisions to make? Do you know which decisions will promote lasting health and which ones will lead to disease prematurely?

This article is dedicated to you: the discerning modern man who wants to take control of his health and thrive; not just survive. In this article, we explore several key concepts in men's health and offer basic recommendations to help you achieve your optimum health. You deserve it! Now read on and learn how to make powerful decisions to alter your health destiny today.

As the proverbs go, "Health is the first wealth" and "Without your health you have nothing"...your health matters and we can't stress this enough. Taking time to build health is not a luxury reserved for the few but a responsibility of each of us. Without a healthy body, mind and spirit you cannot achieve your fullest potential at work, play or in your most intimate relationships.

Know your health

Just how healthy are you? We don't mean "good, bad or okay." We want you to have more than one word answers to describe your health. In order to set health goals or know your health risks you have to really know what's going on inside. The first step in every man's health quest is answering this basic question—how healthy am I?

Get FITT

Before you start an exercise programme, though, check with your doctor. Especially if you are over 40 years, have a history of heart disease or diabetes or cancer. Once you get cleared then you need to decide on the FITT—frequency, intensity, time and type.

Frequency: Sit down with your schedule and figure out just how often you can exercise in a week. Be realistic and set yourself up for success by choosing a number that is really doable. Don't say six days a week if you know you only have three days. Otherwise, you will feel like a failure immediately.

Intensity: When it comes to intensity, there are some basic concepts to consider. If you've never exercised or have a pre-existing health condition, start with a mild intensity exercise like walking or light weights. If you are looking to achieve particular goals like rapid weight loss, preparing for a marathon or packing

on the muscle, then ramp up the intensity.

The easiest way to know your level of intensity is the talk test. If you can talk and sing while exercising then it is of mild intensity. If you can talk but not sing while exercising, then it is of moderate intensity. If you can neither talk nor sing because you are too busy trying to breathe, then we call that a high intensity level of exercise.

Time and type: Time and type are what the two Ts in FITT stand for. Basically they refer to how long you intend to exercise each time and the type of exercise you intend to do. Research shows about 150 minutes a week of mild to moderate exercise gives you the most benefit. So, start with a small number like

10 minutes a day and build up slowly. As for type of exercise, choose something you enjoy as it will help you achieve your health goals. If you are trying to get that rock hard Bollywood body then walking is not enough. If you just want to lose a few pounds and lower your blood pressure, then walking might be just what you need.

Whatever you do, do something! Regular exercise is essential to every man who really wants to be healthy. No excuses!



You have unique health needs and each one needs to be addressed. So, evaluate your health physically, mentally and spiritually. All three areas are important. You may eat all the 'healthy foods' and get plenty of exercise, but if you are in an unhappy relationship or hate your job, then you are definitely not achieving your best health.

So spend some time in reflection, and see what part of your life is aligned with health and which areas need improvement. Also, you may not have all the medical answers on your own, so find a trusted clinician to go through your health history with you; undergo a thorough exam and appropriate testing. After that you should have a good sense of your physical health from the inside out.

Know your enemies

Before a cricket team starts a match or an army goes to battle it 'scouts' its opponents. The players and the soldiers want to know what they are up against and how they can be victorious. In the game of life, you too have several serious health opponents and you need to know them before you meet on the 'field'. In developed countries around the world, the top killers include heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and respiratory illness. In less developed regions, infections, malnourishment and other maladies continue to wreak havoc. India is no different. In fact, the top three causes of death in India are heart disease, respiratory infections and strokes¹. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to prevent these diseases or reduce their seriousness [We will highlight many of them as we go ahead].

So now you are thinking about your health, your risk for disease and wondering what you can do about it.

Choose wisely

Just as important as knowing your opponents is knowing what you can and can't change about the 'competition'. To continue the sports analogy, in a cricket match, you can train hard, know your opponents' strengths and weaknesses and create a great game plan—these are in your control. However, you have no real control over the weather, exactly how many people will come to the match... and a host of other variables. If you spend all your time worrying about things that are out of your control, you will lose the game in no time. In life too, it's the same.

Figure out what aspects of your health are in your control and which aren't. You CAN control the food you eat, your exercise, your body weight, your emotions and a lot more. However, you CANNOT control who or how your parents are, how tall you are or even how much hair you will have left when you grow older. Unfortunately, research shows that some things are just genetically predetermined and alopecia or 'male-pattern hair loss' is one of them. But instead of spending all your time worrying about things beyond your control, start

thinking about what you CAN control and start living the most vibrant life you can. That is what this article is all about. So read on and get excited about your future.

Mind your thoughts

Thoughts are powerful. And they are often precursors to our actions. Are you aware of the thoughts you are harbouring? Do you have any negative health thoughts? Do you ever think you are too ugly or too fat or just not good enough, or not motivated enough? Do you think you have the wrong skin colour or family background or not enough opportunities to achieve happiness? Such negative thoughts will undermine your success and you will never be happy. It's time to get rid of these thoughts, today! One at a time, begin to root them out. If you need help, find a trusted friend, professional counsellor or a spiritual guide, who can help you transform the negativity into affirmation and opportunity. You are important, you can achieve your goals and this is the day to start!

Leave the bad company

Now it's time to put those positive thoughts into action. Perhaps the most powerful health action you can take is to quit smoking and using other harmful substances. Cigarettes, marijuana, heroine, cocaine, betel nuts and other addictions have no place in your health plan. They are incredibly addictive and expensive. Nicotine, in particular, is the leading cause of preventable death in many nations. Remember the three leading causes of death in India—heart disease, respiratory infections, stroke? Well, nicotine is a major risk factor in all three. So take a stand and stop smoking. Your body will thank you; and your partner might just do the same. After all, cigarette smoking is also a major cause of erectile dysfunction [inability to get an erection].

Keep up the good performance

Erectile dysfunction [ED] is a major issue as we age. In fact, studies have shown that by age 65, up to 25 per cent of men may experience ED at least in one out of every four sexual encounters. Even when ED is not an issue, other sexual difficulties like loss of sexual desire, increased time to achieve an erection before sex and faster time to lose erections after orgasm may also complicate bedroom activities that a man has been accustomed to in his youth. There are many contributing factors to these



sexual problems, including chronic illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, chronic pain and arthritis.

Lifestyle choices like use of nicotine, drugs, alcohol, and poor diet can directly lead to many of the medical illnesses that impact your sexual health. Another important factor that can affect and be affected by your sexual wellbeing is your mental health. In fact, loss of sexual desire is often due to everyday stress, emotional fatigue and gathering depression. So if you are not your best in the bedroom, don't start the blame game. Instead take a quick look at your health life first. Are you getting the sleep you need? Are your emotions well-managed or out of control? Another important consideration is your diet.

Watch what you eat

The food you eat is quite possibly the most powerful force for health or disease in your life. This is equally true for both men and women. In developing countries, malnutrition had always been a major focus. However, as the world economy continues to improve and blend, western diets, high in refined sugars and fat are becoming universally available as fast foods. These changes in food habits have brought in their wake a rising tide of metabolic diseases. Studies have shown that diabetes rates in India are predicted to increase 151 per cent from the year 2000 to 2030². Incidence of other chronic illnesses like heart disease and strokes follow similar projections. These facts should iterate the importance of nutritional education in avoiding future health complications.

Eat a variety of foods, especially more unprocessed foods like beans, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Reduce your intake of meat and dairy products, which many

Many men experience erectile dysfunction at least in one out of every four sexual encounters

IMS = PMS for men

It is common knowledge that women suffer from pre-menstrual syndrome [PMS], but few know that men too suffer from a similar condition. It's called IMS or Irritable Male Syndrome. And the symptoms are all similar to PMS—irritability, mood swings, poor concentration, depression,

feeling antisocial, lack of arousal, headache, backache, cramps and even hot flashes.

Dr Aimee Aubeeluck of the University of Derby asked 50 men and 50 women many questions about symptoms of PMS. She found that men actually complained more than women on all counts except water retention.

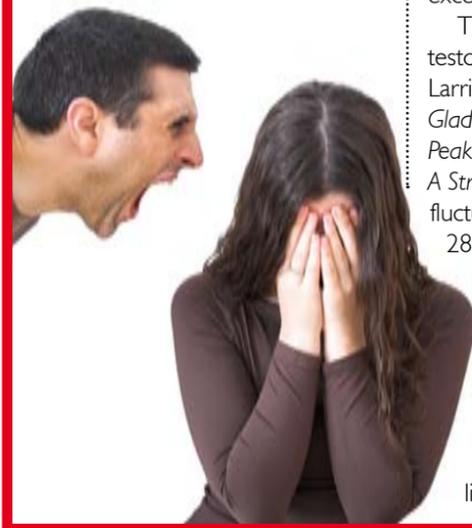
This happens due to a fall in testosterone levels. According to Larrian Gillespie, author of *The Gladiator Diet: How to Preserve Peak Health, Sexual Energy, and A Strong Body*, men experience a fluctuation in their hormones every 28 hours, whereas women's hormones pulsate every 28 days. The levels of testosterone in men are highest in the morning, after which they gradually fall as the day progresses. IMS results when the levels fall beyond a certain limit. The fall in testosterone

could be due to natural or other factors such as diet, stress, alcohol or inactivity.

Jed Diamond, author of the *Irritable Male Syndrome* writes that the IMS is similar to andropause in some of its symptoms, but unlike andropause, it is not limited to middle age. IMS can occur at any age and the symptoms are most prominent when the men are undergoing significant transitions—adolescence or midlife, for instance. The symptoms can vary from being mild to severe, and according to Diamond, are noticed by everyone but the affected man. It's the spouse or the man's partner that bears the most brunt of the emotional symptoms and many spouses of such men describe being around them as walking on egg shells.

— Shiv Joshi

References: www.strive4impact.com;
www.thisislondon.co.uk



men make the mistake of making the centre of their meals. Healthy foods provide important antioxidants, vitamins and fibres that are often absent in processed foods. Use animal fats and cooking oils, such as *vanaspati ghee* and butter in moderation. Also, consume salt and refined sugars cautiously.

Many processed and refined foods contain chemicals and preservatives that offer no nutritional benefit, and may have deleterious effects later on.

Be wary of quick fixes, or magic cures. Your body will thrive off a diet rich in colourful, health-promoting foods in wide variety and moderate quantity. Use supplements and nutritional products only as 'supplementation' to an already healthy diet programme—they are not the answer, just part of it.

Eat in moderation

The amount of food eaten is also important. With more calorie-dense foods offered by fast food and traditional restaurants, we are often victims of overeating, consuming hundreds or even thousands of calories in a single meal before we realise it. Thus, more emphasis needs to be placed on eating correct portion sizes with meals, and knowing the general nutritional value of foods.

In general, a male should consume roughly 2700 calories a day, which divided in three equal meals is about 900 calories per meal. 900 calories in a meal may seem like a lot, but when we actually look at the calorie content of certain foods, we realise that if we make wrong food choices, it can be quite easy to overeat. For example, a serving [1/2 cup] of *kheer* for dessert has almost 500 calories, more than half the calories allotted to your single meal and that certainly doesn't include appetiser, entrée or beverages that typically come with dinner. Don't forget that an extra 500 calories per day [such as a bagle or one large candy bar] adds up to an extra pound of fat on your body per week. A better understanding of nutritional content, specifically calories, can therefore help to guide your nutritional choices.

There are many online websites and even applications for cell phones available to guide you about your meal choices and calories. Dietary specialists and your clinician can advise you as well.

Although men and women both put on weight if they consume extra calories or fail to stay sufficiently active, they distribute it differently. Women classically put on weight at the buttocks, hips and thighs in what some authors call a 'pear' distribution. Men, on the other hand,

accumulate weight on the belly, right around the midline. This 'spare-tire' of weight is called 'apple fat,' belly fat or visceral fat. It is the most dangerous type of fat, as it releases hormones that increase systemic inflammation, which increases your risk for heart disease, cancer and diabetes. So do yourself a favour, get rid of that belly fat. The first step in doing that is to fill your body with more health-promoting foods we listed above.

Don't stress

Stress is something we all experience, and many argue that as we age, the stress levels increase. Obligations to family, co-workers, boss and community can place a heavy toll on your emotional wellbeing. When you are overwhelmed, you experience stress, or physiologically, a fight-or-flight response caused by up-regulation of stress hormones that can help you physically deal with challenging times. However, when you experience these feelings chronically and are unable to effectively reduce stress, you experience the deleterious effects. A prolonged stress response can affect every system in your body, including suppressing your immune system. This makes you more susceptible to infections and elevates blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. Increased ageing, sleep disturbance, obesity, frequent fatigue and even cancer are known to be associated with chronic stress.

Your mental health can also be affected, with stress being a risk factor for depression and anxiety.

So now that you know the negative effects of stress, what can you do about it? The first and most important thing is to work on your relationships.

Work on your bonds

Building meaningful relationships with friends and loved ones promotes your own well-being. Make sure you set aside time for social activities with friends and family. If your relationships are the reason for stress, then focus on eliminating the bad ones and improving the ones you can. Many men also make the mistake of keeping their emotions hidden inside. The stereotypical male never talks about his problems, fears, anxieties or insecurities and instead bottles them up. This bottled up emotion increases your baseline stress and has been shown to increase your risk of the big three killers.

On a day-to-day basis, unresolved stress can lead to disharmony in your family, friendships and work. It sickens the very cells in your body that you depend on for good health. So don't carry on stereotypes. Instead reach out, open up, express your needs and free yourself of unnecessary emotional baggage.

Besides talking it out with your friends and family, there are other activities you can focus on to deal with stress. Everyone has his own ways of reducing stress, ranging from physical ones like running or weight lifting, to spiritual pursuits like prayer. The important thing

is to find an activity that helps you relax. Organised sports like cricket, basketball and soccer may not only be a source of physical de-stressing, but also offer you opportunity to form and strengthen relationships with your teammates.

At home, you can try yoga, deep breathing exercises and meditation—these are easy activities that can be done routinely as a practice or during particularly stressful times. Make time for these habits. Fostering tranquil-

Careful with those laptops

Laptops may have great functional and brag value, but they aren't doing any favour to men. Researchers from the *Stony Brook University* in New York have found that keeping the laptop on your lap heats your scrotum, which may affect your fertility. And no, it doesn't help much using a pad or shield under your laptop.

It's important for your testicles to be 2 – 4 degrees cooler than your body because it helps the sperm cells to divide rapidly. If the area gets heated beyond acceptable levels, it not only slows down the sperms but also diminishes their ability to fertilise an egg for weeks or months.



But don't lose heart, there's a way to use the laptop without it affecting your fertility. Spread your legs as far apart as possible when keeping the laptop on your thighs. The researchers found that if you keep your legs together, the scrotal temperature rises by around 2.2 degrees Celsius with a pad and 2.3 degrees without a pad. But when you spread your legs, it results in less heating of the scrotum—the temperature goes up by just 1.4 degrees.

Moreover, spreading your legs also slows down the heating process. The researchers found that the scrotums of the subjects who splayed their legs, heated to 1 degree Celsius in 28 minutes. But with legs together, it took just 11 minutes.

— Team CW

Reference: wired.com

Check yourself often

It's important for every man to do a Testicular Self Examination or TSE to help understand what is normal for him and detect problems in time.

Brown University, USA, recommends that you check yourself once every month—it takes only a few minutes and is simple. Perhaps you can set the same date every month—like your birthday—for doing it. Experts recommend checking yourself after having a warm bath or a shower, as the heat softens the skin of the scrotum, making it easier to detect anomalies.

Here's what to do. Sit comfortably and first simply hold your testicles in your hands to get used to the weight. You will feel one testicle hanging lower than the other, which is normal. Now, examine each testicle separately by holding it with both your hands, thumbs on top and your fingers below. Gently roll the skin of the testicle without rubbing it to avoid hurting yourself. It should feel smooth and not have any tenderness or lump. Don't mistake the slight lump like structure at the top and back of the testicle for an anomaly—it's the cord that transports your sperms. Usually cancerous lumps are found at the front, not here.

You are looking for:

- Hard non-tender lumps or nodules
- Change in the feel of each testicle
- Extra heavy or enlarged testicle
- Unusual firmness
- Dull pain in the scrotum, groin or lower abdomen.

If you notice any of the above, see your doctor.

— Team CW

Experts recommend that a man should consume roughly 2700 calories a day



lity and mental serenity will go a long way in helping you when the stress hits.

Another thing, your diet during stressful periods is important. Having comfort foods that your mom made when you grew up can boost your levels of serotonin, a calming brain chemical. A nutritional diet high in antioxidants, vitamins and minerals can help to boost the immune system during difficult times. Oranges, black tea, spinach and pistachios also help reduce the amount of stress hormones in your body.

Sweat it out

When it comes to exercise, it's actually pretty simple. It's exactly as a popular ad says: Just do it. Exercise that increases your heart rate and challenges your muscles, burns fat, and reduces your risk of heart disease, lung problems, stroke and diabetes. It also does fun stuff like improve stamina in the bedroom, elevate mood and increase lean muscle mass. Which man doesn't want that? If that's not enough to get you moving, keep in mind that regular exercise can reduce your need for medications as you age, help you manage stress better and lower your cancer risk. It even helps improve self image. It's true. Exercise affects bodily systems and lowers disease risk more than any drug or procedure.

Get on the road to health

It's time to put it all together. You have a life to live, dreams to pursue, goals to accomplish. To achieve your fullest potential in all of these undertakings, you need good health. The great news is that some of the most powerful influences on your health are the personal choices you make every day.

In other words, YOU are in control. Of course, with that power comes responsibility.

It's time to set out on a new path for greater personal and societal health. Sit down, write your goals, re-check them regularly and be honest. Take charge of your health. You can do it; today is the day to start! As the Greek stoic Epictectus wrote, "First, say to yourself what you would be and then do what you have to do."

References:

- 1: http://www.who.int/wbosis/mort/profiles/mort_searo_ind_india.pdf
2. Wild S, Roglic G: Global prevalence of diabetes, estimates for the year 2000 and projections for 2030. *Diabetes Care* 27:1047-1053, 2004

Stay Well

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