

A gotta-do list for Men's Health Month

Life & Work Connections
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Health, according to the **World Health Organization** ^[1], is not the absence of disease. Instead, it is a state of physical, mental and social well-being.

It's almost a cliché that people who identify as men, particularly cisgender men, tend to ignore certain aspects of their health and wellness. This neglect often leads to negative health outcomes. Therefore, each June, we observe Men's Health Month to encourage boys, men and their families to implement healthy living practices.

Due to a variety of factors, some conditions have a disproportionate significance based on the sex you were assigned at birth. As **research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** ^[2] shows, those who were assigned male die at a higher rate from heart disease, cancer, diabetes and suicide than those who were assigned female. (Note that the Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC use a binary gender framework when collecting public health information, and their data does not account for transgender and nonbinary people.)

There is good news, though. You can take steps to help reduce your risk for these leading causes of death.

Preventive care (aka you've gotta pop the hood)

Cancer, diabetes and heart disease: These chronic diseases are far too common in the United States today. Healthy practices like **exercising regularly** ^[3], eating a balanced diet and **managing stress** ^[4] can help reduce your likelihood of developing them.

But to truly know how your body is doing, you need to pop the hood and look inside. This means taking the time to schedule a checkup with your primary care physician to discuss your habits, family history, medical history and more.

If you can't get to the doctor soon, an alternative starting place in your preventive health journey is a workplace **mini health screening** ^[5]. This 20-minute appointment, free for benefits-eligible employees and conveniently located on the University's Tucson campus, will identify some of your basic biometric numbers, including your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

You can bring these numbers to your next doctor's visit and begin your conversation with a solid baseline of information. (Details about how to get a mini health screening in the fall will be sent to employees next month.)

And if lowering your likelihood of disease isn't enough incentive, maybe this is: You can get money from the state for participating in preventive care. Sign up for the **Health Impact Program** ^[6], earn points by participating wellness activities such as mini health screenings, and receive up to \$200 per year.

Mental health care (aka you've gotta release the pressure)

I was often told growing up that "boys don't cry," or that I should just "man up." Statements like these **fuel the fire of toxic masculinity** ^[7] and can keep those of us who identify as men from reaching out for help when we really need it.

Suicide has been a **top 10 leading cause of death** ^[8] in the U.S for many years. Men die from suicide almost four times more often than those who identify as women, and middle-aged men die at the highest rate. (It has to be said that trans and nonbinary people, **especially adolescents** ^[9], and other members of the **LGBTQ+ community** ^[10] are also at high risk of suicide, as research from the University's own **Russell Toomey** and others has demonstrated.)

Suicide is a complex public health crisis, and addressing it requires a multifaceted approach. Still, **data shows** ^[11] that some factors have led to increases in suicidal behavior among men, such as that tendency to avoid seeking help.

James R. Naughton ^[12], an employee counselor at Life & Work Connections with more than 20 years of experience in substance abuse counseling and trauma-centered therapy, says that men are too often "dying to be tough," and that they believe there is no benefit to showing their emotions.

"Men are socialized by parents and peers not to be vulnerable," he says.

But it is, and should be, normal to talk about how you feel, and to seek help when you're having a hard time. We've all been helped with something in our lives, from learning how to tie our shoes, to moving out of our first apartment. We are not ashamed of those experiences, so why should we be ashamed of needing help dealing with difficult emotions?

You don't need to let it get to a critical point before you seek help. As a benefits-eligible University employee, you can reach out for noncrisis **employee assistance counseling** ^[13] any time. And if you or someone you know is struggling, you can contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by calling 800-273-8255 or texting HOME (4663) to 741-741. In an

immediate crisis, call 911 and request a crisis intervention team.

What comes next (aka you've gotta take care)

Are you starting to think about your health in new ways, or in ways you haven't for a while? Good. Instead of adding summer projects to your to-do list this month, try to focus on yourself and what will help keep you running well in the long term.

Your health is important; you are important. Take time to invest on your journey toward physical, mental and social well-being.

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Stay up to date with opportunities to improve your wellness by subscribing to the **Life & Work Connections email list** ^[15].

A **version of this article** ^[16] appeared on the Life & Work Connections website.

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Links

[1] <http://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/frequently-asked-questions> [2] <http://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/lcod/men/2017/all-races-origins/index.htm> [3] <http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html> [4] <http://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/stress-and-heart-health> [5] <http://lifework.arizona.edu/events-workshops/health-screenings> [6] <http://lifework.arizona.edu/programs/health-impact-program> [7] <http://www.blackburncenter.org/post/2018/02/21/why-saying-boys-don-t-cry-hurts-boys-and-men> [8] <http://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/> [9] <http://news.arizona.edu/story/study-reveals-which-transgender-teens-have-highest-suicide-risk> [10] <http://afsp.org/lgbtq-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention> [11] <http://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190313-why-more-men-kill-themselves-than-women> [12] <https://lifework.arizona.edu/person/james-naughton-ma-lpc-lisac> [13] <http://lifework.arizona.edu/counseling-coaching/employee-assistance-counseling> [14] <http://lifework.arizona.edu/person/chad-myler-ms-ches> [15] <http://bit.ly/uaz-lwc-email-list> [16] <http://lifework.arizona.edu/news/2021/06/prioritize-yourself-during-mens-health-month>