

# TOUGH GUYS FINISH LAST

Men should be aware of five common health issues and stop avoiding their doctors **By Tom Hanlon**

**A**s boys, many of us were taught to be tough, not to cry. If we got hurt playing sandlot football, we rubbed a little dirt on our wound and played on. "That socialization of ignoring pain is OK if you're playing a football game and you can get through to the fourth quarter," says David Gremillion, M.D., a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine and a spokesman for Men's Health Network, an educational organization committed to improving the health and wellness of men. "But it's not OK if you're in your fifties and you have pain

behind your sternum. Ignoring pain then could become lethal."

Acting tough and ignoring pain and other warnings of the body has led to what Gremillion calls a silent health crisis in America. "The crisis is silent because it's ignored by mainstream medicine, and it has been ignored by men themselves," he says. "And that crisis is simply that men live sicker and die younger than women." (See "How long are we living?") Many men, he says, find it stigmatizing to go to a doctor to seek help.

For example, a recent national survey by Men's Health Network showed that nearly 70 percent of men would rather change their daily routines to compensate for the need to urinate more frequently than seek medical attention for their enlarged prostate.

Prostate problems—including prostate cancer—make up just one set of health concerns that men face today. Knowing more about these prevalent diseases can make all the difference in living not just a longer life, but a healthier and more satisfying one.

HEALTH ISSUE:

## Prostate Cancer

The prostate is a gland about the size of a walnut found only in men, below the bladder and in front of the rectum. Nearly all prostate cancers start in the gland cells.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer for American men, other than skin cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. The organization estimates there will be about 234,000 cases of prostate cancer in the United States this year; about 27,000 will die from the disease.

"Unfortunately, right now we don't have any clear causes for prostate cancer," says Durado Brooks, M.D., the American Cancer Society's director of prostate and colorectal cancer. "We do know [the risk of] prostate cancer increases significantly as men age and continues to increase throughout their lifespan."

Indeed, age is the biggest risk factor, and family history is significant as well. "African Americans, for unclear reasons, have about 60 percent greater risk for developing the disease and are about twice as likely to die from the disease [than white men]," says Brooks. "We don't really know how to [lower] the incidence in African-American men, but we think by improving the diagnosis and treatment we can decrease the mortality rate."

The cancer is diagnosed through a prostate-specific antigen blood test and through digital rectal exams, both of which typically begin at age 50 for men of average risk and are administered annually thereafter. For those with higher risk, screening is recommended beginning at age 45.

Because the causes of the cancer are unknown, the things men can do to reduce the risk of getting pros-

tate cancer are more general in nature: eating a diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables and low in saturated fats and fatty meats; getting regular exercise; and maintaining a healthy body weight.

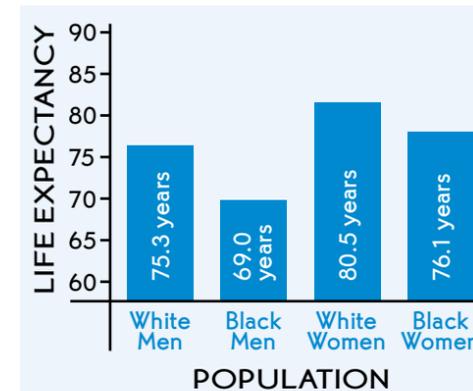
"There is one large study going on right now looking at the possibility of preventive agents: vitamin E and a compound called selenium," says Brooks. This study is looking at whether or not either of those agents might decrease the risk of developing prostate cancer.

For more information:  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**Health Fact:**  
 The risk of prostate cancer increases as men age.

How long are we living?

**A**mericans are living longer than ever before, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. White and black men and women have all reached unprecedented life expectancies.



Life expectancy has also improved for Hispanic men and women, and Asian/Pacific Islander men.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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## Do You Need a Tune-Up?

Do you take better care of your car than yourself? Take this quick self-check to assess your health.

- 1. I'm not interested in activities I used to enjoy. Yes No**  
People experiencing depression often have a hard time getting excited about things that used to bring them pleasure.
- 2. I have trouble sleeping. Yes No**  
Sleeping too much or not enough can be signs of depression.
- 3. I often feel like I have to urinate, but then I have a hard time going. Yes No**  
Feeling as if you can't empty your bladder is a possible symptom of prostate cancer.
- 4. I've noticed blood in my urine. Yes No**  
This serious condition is called hematuria, and you should talk to your doctor about it. It might signal prostate cancer.
- 5. My blood pressure is consistently more than 135/85. Yes No**  
If your blood pressure is high, you may be at increased risk for heart disease.
- 6. A member of my immediate family has had a heart attack, stroke or heart surgery. Yes No**  
Family history is a major risk factor for heart disease. Know your history, and do what you can to prevent heart problems.
- 7. My face, arms or legs have felt numb or weak, especially on one side of my body. Yes No**  
Numbness and weakness, even if the feelings are only momentary, could be signs of stroke.
- 8. I've experienced sudden vision problems. Yes No**  
Don't ignore blurry vision, dimness or double vision. Talk to your doctor about the possibility of stroke.
- 9. I spend time around smokers. Yes No**  
Inhaling secondhand smoke is as dangerous as smoking. Encourage your loved ones to quit, and avoid smoky bars and restaurants as much as possible.
- 10. I have a cough that won't go away. Yes No**  
Persistent coughing is often one of the first signs of lung cancer or other lung diseases. Also watch for wheezing and coughing up blood.

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, talk to your doctor.

—Elizabeth Watson



Exercising regularly reduces the risk of many diseases. Find an activity you enjoy and get out there!

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### HEALTH ISSUE:

## Heart Disease

In 2003, about 33 million men had some form of cardiovascular disease, and the disease killed more than 426,000 men that year, according to the American Heart Association. Still, there is hope, says Richard Stein, M.D., director of preventive cardiology at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City and a spokesman for the American Heart Association.

"When I began 30 years ago, and a 50-year-old man had a heart attack, I believed I could add extra years to his life," says Stein. "Now I believe he can outlive this disease. An informed, assertive patient and physician who is knowledgeable and wants to work with an informed, assertive patient can add a tremendous number of good-quality years to life."

It's important to know the risk factors and respond accordingly. There are three risk factors you can't change: your age, your gender and your heredity. But there are many risk factors you can do something about: smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity and obesity, to name a few.

**Health Fact:**  
The lifetime risk for cardiovascular disease is 2 in 3 for men.

Taking control of these risk factors, Stein says, "requires your ability to change two or three fundamental behaviors—and they aren't easy to change."

Some risk factors—high cholesterol and high blood pressure, for example—require working closely with your doctor. "You can't do those by yourself," Stein says. "You need to have your blood pressure tested. If it's elevated, you need it to be treated, and you need to know that it's being treated down to what we call guideline levels, the levels in the studies that have shown the best protection."

Stein, author of *Outliving Heart Disease: The 10 New Rules for Prevention and Treatment*, says that diet and exercise are the key to outliving the disease: "You need to ask your doctor for a referral to a nutritionist and about what exercise to do. If he or she can't be very forthcoming there, then ask to see an exercise specialist and to get a stress test, which is a good beginning tool for an exercise specialist to use [to design] a program for you. You have to get knowledgeable and push

for that. Otherwise it's not going to happen."

To prevent cardiovascular disease, Stein recommends that you know where your blood pressure and cholesterol should be, that you understand your risk factors, that you know how much exercise to do, and that you understand what tests to expect when you visit your doctor. (For more information on what tests to expect, go to [ylifemagazine.com](http://ylifemagazine.com) and search by article ID 230.)

You can decrease heart disease risks by taking these steps:

- Don't smoke or use tobacco products.
- Exercise regularly. Get 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet, limiting your fat intake (especially saturated fat and trans fat), and eating lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get regular health screenings for blood pressure and cholesterol.

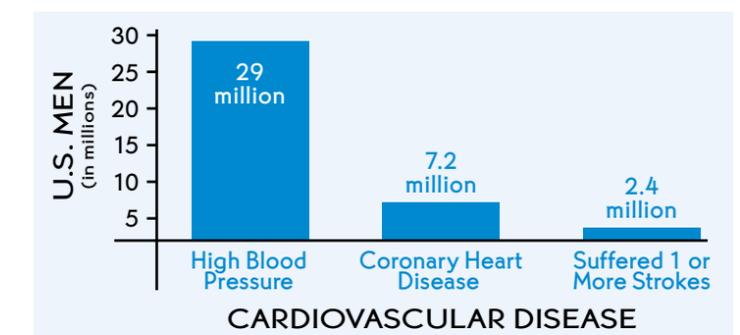
The first rule in outliving heart disease is finding out that you have it. "Our greatest risk is having heart disease and not knowing it, and having the first presentation be a heart attack," says Stein. "Only 75 percent of people survive heart attacks. You have a one in four chance of dying if you have a heart attack. That's a gigantic risk."

For more information:  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

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## The prevalence of cardiovascular disease

An estimated 33 million American men have one or more forms of cardiovascular disease. Here's a breakdown.



Note: There is overlap among the numbers because many men have more than one cardiovascular disease.

Source: American Heart Association

# In This Game, Quitters Win

**S**moking is a major risk factor for many diseases, particularly lung cancer: Smoking causes 90 percent of lung cancer cases in men. Thomas Glynn, Ph.D., director of cancer science and trends for the American Cancer Society, recommends the following strategies for anyone who wants to quit smoking:



**1. Get motivated.** "For a lot of people, it's helpful to make a list of the reasons they want to quit smoking," Glynn says. "That could be better health. It could be wanting to live long enough to see your children or your grandchildren grow up. It could be to save money or to have your clothes smell better or to please your spouse or partner." Some people, he says, laminate the list and keep it in their pocket. When they're tempted to smoke, they pull it out and remind themselves why they're putting themselves through the wringer.

**2. Set a quit date**—about two to four weeks away. "You don't want to set it for the next day, because you're not ready," Glynn says. "You don't want to set it too far in the future, or you'll lose your determination. It's also helpful to set it to a date that's meaningful to you: a birthday or some anniversary."

**3. Gain support.** "Get your family, your friends and your co-workers behind your plan," Glynn says. "One, you need them to help support you, and two, you're going to be pretty nasty for a while, and they need to be ready for it and give you some leeway."

**4. Get the best medication for you.** Glynn recommends talking to your physician or pharmacist about the best quitting aids. "There are a lot of medications available now," he says. "There are nicotine replacement therapies as well as Zyban, which is an antidepressant. They're not miracle drugs, but they will double your chances of becoming a quitter."

**5. Discard your smoking paraphernalia.** Round up all of your tobacco products, ashtrays, lighters and matches, and throw them out.

**6. Be prepared for a slip.** "There's virtually no one who is able to stop the first time," Glynn says. "It usually takes three, four or five cycles through. If people understand that, it makes it easier to deal with—they're not a failure, they've just slipped." Glynn recommends that you analyze why you slipped, realize that trying to quit may take a few attempts—and then get right back into quitting. —*Tom Hanlon*

Have you recently stopped smoking? Tell us why and how you did it. Write [editor@ylifemagazine.com](mailto:editor@ylifemagazine.com) or go to [ylifemagazine.com](http://ylifemagazine.com) and click on Contact Us.

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HEALTH ISSUE:

## Stroke

In 2003, 2.4 million men suffered a stroke, according to the American Heart Association. That year, strokes killed about 61,600 men. When strokes don't kill, they often seriously disable those who suffer them.

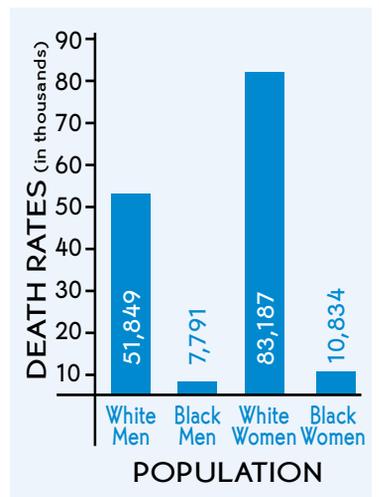
"High blood pressure is the runaway head risk factor for stroke," says Stein. "Stroke can also occur due to an irregularity of the heart called atrial fibrillation," he says. "If a patient doesn't know he has it and isn't appropriately treated for it, the chances of having a stroke are five times that of someone without atrial fibrillation."

**Health Fact:** High blood pressure is the leading risk factor for stroke.

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### Strokes and death rates

**S**troke is the third largest cause of death, ranking behind heart disease and all forms of cancer. The death rates in 2003 were:



Source: American Heart Association