



Topic: Men's health

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By the Decades: Holistic Fitness for Men

The outlook for men is grim. In 1920, women lived, on average, one year longer than men. Now, men, on average, die over five years earlier than women, and are more likely to suffer from conditions such as cancer, stroke, and heart disease. By age 100, women outnumber men eight to one, according to the Men's Health Policy Center.

It's not so clear why men have a shorter life span than women do. It may be due to inherited traits and male sex hormones, as well as body fat distribution around the waist. Men are more likely to build up fat around the abdomen, having apple-shape bodies, which is associated with an increased mortality.

Does the outlook have to be this way? Furthermore, what steps can men take to decrease the gap in life expectancy between women? This is the first in a series of articles that will document men's efforts to stay healthy and fit. I'll give you the perspective of four men in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s and what they do to prevent chronic conditions and maintain a lifestyle of holistic health and fitness.

Darryl Olive, age 29, yoga instructor and holistic health practitioner. In their 20s, the biggest health risk for men is risky behavior. Accidents, suicide and homicide are among the most frequent causes of death. I remember partying all night, sometimes without sleep for several days. My early 20s were the time of liberation at all costs. Physically I felt my best, and it was easy to maintain a healthy weight despite what I consumed. At first pure strength and performance were my biggest concerns physically. I also continued to run long and hard as a continuation of my training and competitiveness from high school track. I was not so connected to my spiritual and mental self as I approach 30. Yoga has become more important to me as I age, mostly to maintain a mindful existence.

Isaac Fields, age 37, quality control analyst. For many men, the risks for heart disease can show up in the 30s. For Isaac endurance has become less important over time, while flexibility and maintaining a fit look has increased. "Fitness is a state of mind, a mind-changing decision more so than just physical exertion," says Isaac. Isaac has been able to maintain his health in his 30s

by having a convenient home gym, consisting of a Bowflex and dumbbells. He has turned to a holistic fitness program including yoga to help manage stress—the biggest stressor getting his house sold after ending a long-term relationship.

Ken Johnson, age 42, software consultant. In the 40s, eye sight is the first thing to go. It could be time for your first reading glasses. Dental issues begin appearing too. So it's not a time to skimp on your routine cleanings. Ken finds that in his 40s he feels his best mentally, while physically he is beginning to feel the demands from his active lifestyle, including hiking, biking and skiing. He notes that, "I didn't think about fitness in my 20s or 30s. Now in my 40s, healthy aging is more important." Ken adds that, "flexibility from yoga has helped him enjoy his hobbies, something many men his age can't do."

David Oliver, age 56, attorney. The number one risk in your 50s is heart disease. Therefore, cholesterol, blood pressure, and weight are important indicators of health, not to mention prostate and colon cancer screenings. For David, holistic fitness involves an integrated approach to life—a habit that is centered around appropriateness versus abilities from his youth. David explains, "It's important for me to be outdoors when I am physically active and helps keep my connection to the elements." David began studying Buddhism as a youth, which led to his interest in yoga. Today, he uses yoga, meditation along with a daily walking program to manage the stress of his demanding law career. He adds that it also gave him the energy to enjoy his hobbies including horseback riding and skiing.

Tips from the experts:

- Don't smoke or use other tobacco products
- Eat a varied diet rich in fruits and vegetables, and avoid high-fat foods
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Have regular preventive health screenings
- Know your family medical history and review it with your doctor

Tips from the interviewed guys:

- Be mindful, consistent and have a long-term strategy to health and fitness
- Find something that you enjoy and stick with it
- It's never too late to start. Take your time and listen to your body.
- Have balance physically, spiritually and mentally

June is National Men's Health Month. It is celebrated across the country with screenings, health fairs, media appearances, and other health education and outreach activities. KCFitnessLink is offering free health consultations to men as a part of Men's Health Month.

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