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Why Do Men Skip Health Tests?

Women live 5.1 years longer on average than men. Could the male tendency to avoid doctors have anything to do with it?

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Former president Bill Clinton admitted he ignored his chest pain for several months. He had also stopped taking a drug his doctor prescribed to lower his cholesterol. But extreme symptoms finally got him to a doctor - who rushed him into [heart surgery](#).

Women across America sighed knowingly: Why is it many men won't follow medical advice or go to see a doctor before a crisis?

The difference between men and women

It's a fact that women are quicker to see a doctor when they develop symptoms. In contrast, men are more likely to ignore symptoms and hope they go away. Often, by the time a man sees a doctor, his symptoms may be severe and harder to manage or treat.

Men are 24 percent less likely than women to have visited a doctor in the past year, according to recent U.S. government statistics. For an African American or Hispanic male, the odds of having seen a doctor are even lower. Ditto for men ages 18 to 44.

Women live 5.1 years longer on average than men. Could men's avoidance of doctors and routine checkups have anything to do with that?

Not seeing a doctor regularly means that you lose out on important [health screenings](#) or early diagnosis. You can feel fine, but still have conditions, such as [high cholesterol](#) or high blood pressure, that need treatment. Men may also miss out on [preventive care](#). They are a lot more likely than women to need

hospital care for preventable illnesses ([pneumonia](#) , for example) or disease complications from diabetes or heart failure.

Is seeing a doctor like asking for directions?

The rap on men is that they don't ask for directions when lost. Perhaps they think they don't need a doctor's help either?

Men's attitudes about physicals may have come from their own fathers who avoided doctors. And some boys grew up with the message that expressing pain or sickness was a sign of weakness.

According to more than 1,000 men taking part in a 2007 survey commissioned by the American Academy of Family Physicians:

- Thirty-six percent said they see a doctor only when "extremely sick."
- Fifty-five percent did not have a routine physical in the last year.
- Almost one in five, age 55 and older, had not been screened for [colon cancer](#) .

Men also tend to be less willing than women to discuss their health. Women may talk freely about breast lumps, [depression](#) , or [urinary problems](#) to a friend or a doctor. For some men, talking to a doctor or spouse may be embarrassing if the subject involves their genitals, bowels, or mental health.

Men's health is women's work

Women are usually the gatekeepers of health in the family. They are often the ones who make medical appointments for other family members. Many men will not see a doctor unless prodded by the women in their life.

If you're a man, you can learn from women that getting suggested screenings and checkups can lead to a longer, healthier life. Early detection and treatment of cholesterol and [blood pressure](#) problems can prevent a heart attack or stroke. Detecting a tumor before it has spread can make the difference in whether or not a cancer is treatable.

If you are a woman with a man in your life, keep nudging your guy to exercise (with his doctor's OK), eat nutritiously, and seek appropriate medical care for his age and family history. In the AAFP survey, 80 percent of men with wives or girlfriends said their partner helped convince them to see a doctor. Being accused of nagging in this case is a small price to pay for possibly saving a loved one's life.

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