The Strong, Silent Problem

10 Health Challenges Men Face — and How to Beat Them
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Every June, Men's Health Month asks a simple question that too many men avoid: *How are you, really?*

It's a question worth taking seriously. In most Western nations, men live about five years less than women on average and that gap has been widening for decades, according to the CDC and reporting by NPR. Much of that difference isn't written into our biology. It's written into our habits: the checkups we skip, the symptoms we shrug off, and the feelings we bury under "I'm fine."

Men's health gets overlooked partly because men overlook it themselves. Only about 60% of men go in for an annual checkup, and roughly 40% wait until something is seriously wrong before seeing a doctor, per data cited by the American Journal of Managed Care. The good news? Almost every challenge below responds to small, doable changes. Here are the ten that matter most and suggestions on what you can actually do about each one.

1. Skipping the Doctor

Men are significantly less likely than women to seek medical care, and CDC figures show women make preventive-care visits at a far higher rate than men. The problem is that the conditions caught at a routine visit such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, early cancers, diabetes are exactly the ones that respond beautifully to early treatment and turn deadly when ignored. Since men do not embrace routine checkups, they are in a higher risk.

Try this: Book one annual physical and put it on the calendar like any other appointment. If you haven't been in years, just start. One visit breaks the cycle.

2. The "Tough It Out" Mindset and the Punishment for Breaking It

Here's where culture does real damage. Boys are still raised on phrases like "man up," "don't cry," and "suck it up." So men learn early that strength means silence and the few who break that silence are often punished for it. A man who finally says "I'm depressed" is too frequently met with a joke, an eye-roll, or "come on, it's not that bad." He isn't taken seriously, so he absorbs the lesson that opening up costs him something and he goes quiet again.

That dismissal is its own kind of harm. It treats vulnerability as weakness when the truth is the reverse: it takes far more nerve to admit you're struggling than to keep performing fine. And the cost of all that bottled-up silence is steep; depression and anxiety in men frequently go unreported and undiagnosed because the symptoms surface as anger, withdrawal, or overwork rather than tears.

Try this: If you're the one struggling, reframe vulnerability as maintenance, not failure by telling one trusted person "I've been struggling lately" is one of the strongest things you can do. And if a man opens up to *you*, take him seriously. Don't fix it, minimize it, or laugh it off, just listen. How you respond decides whether he ever speaks up again.

3. A Hidden Suicide Crisis

This is the most urgent consequence of that silence. Men die by suicide at nearly four times the rate of women in the U.S., roughly 39,000 male deaths in 2024 versus about 9,800 female deaths, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the CDC. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young men aged 20–39. Many of these men were never in any kind of care.

Try this: Learn the warning signs in yourself and your friends; withdrawal, hopelessness, giving things away, drastic mood shifts. If you or someone you know is struggling, call or text your local Suicide & Crisis Lifeline anytime. Reaching out early saves lives.

4. Heart Disease, the Quiet Number One

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, responsible for about a quarter of all U.S. deaths, per CDC mortality data. It often builds silently for years through high blood pressure and cholesterol before announcing itself.

Try this: Know your numbers; blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar. Even 150 minutes a week of brisk walking measurably lowers your risk, and it's free.

5. Prostate and Testicular Health

Prostate cancer accounts for about 30% of all cancer diagnoses in men and is the second-leading cause of cancer death among men, according to the American Cancer Society's 2025 statistics. The hopeful part: when caught early, the five-year survival rate is around 98–99%. Testicular cancer, meanwhile, is most common in younger men and is highly treatable when found early.

Try this: Talk to your doctor about when to begin PSA screening (often around age 50, earlier if you have risk factors or family history). Younger men: a quick monthly self-check takes seconds and catches problems early.

6. Chronic Stress and Burnout

Many men tie their identity to work and providing, and quietly absorb stress until it leaks into their sleep, mood, relationships, and heart health. Burnout isn't a character flaw, it's a physiological state, and it raises the risk of nearly everything else on this list.

Try this: Build in genuine recovery, not just collapse. Protect one hour a day for something restorative such as a walk, a hobby, time outdoors and treat it as non-negotiable.

7. Loneliness and Thin Support Networks

Men's friendships often fade in adulthood, narrowing to a partner or no one at all. Research consistently links isolation to higher risks of depression, heart disease, and early death and married men tend to outlive unmarried men partly because someone is nudging them toward the doctor.

Try this: Reach out to one old friend this week. Schedule something recurring such as a standing call, a pickup game, a monthly meetup so connection doesn't depend on motivation.

8. Poor Sleep

Sleep is treated as optional by men who wear exhaustion like a badge of honor. But chronic short sleep drives weight gain, high blood pressure, impaired focus, low testosterone, and depression. Sleep apnea, which is more common in men, often goes undiagnosed for years.

Try this: Aim for 7–9 hours and keep a consistent schedule. If you snore heavily or wake up exhausted no matter what, ask your doctor about a sleep study.

9. Alcohol and Substance Use

Men are more likely than women to drink heavily and to use drugs, and substance use frequently doubles as a way to self-medicate stress and unspoken emotional pain circling back to challenge #2.

Try this: Track your weekly intake honestly for two weeks; awareness alone often shifts behavior. If cutting back feels hard, that's useful information worth bringing to a professional, not a reason for shame.

10. Everyday Lifestyle Habits

Diet, exercise, and weight aren't about chasing a six-pack, they're the daily levers behind heart disease, diabetes, and several cancers. Men hold higher mortality rates for 8 of the 10 leading causes of death, and lifestyle drives much of that.

Try this: Pick one small, sustainable change such as a vegetable at lunch, a 20-minute walk, swapping one soda for water and let it stick before adding the next. Tiny habits beat dramatic overhauls.

The Bottom Line: Strength Is Showing Up

None of this requires becoming a different person overnight. It requires one phone call, one honest conversation, one walk, one checkup. The men who live longest aren't the ones who never struggle, they're the ones who pay attention and ask for help.

If you're a man reading this: Book the appointment. Say the hard thing out loud. Take the small step. Real strength isn't pretending you're invincible; it's taking care of the one body and mind you've got.

If you love a man reading this: You have more influence than you think. Ask the second question after “I’m fine.” Make the doctor’s appointment with him. Tell him that opening up makes him stronger in your eyes, not weaker. Sometimes the most life-saving thing is simply letting him know he doesn’t have to carry it alone.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH); American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP); American Cancer Society, Cancer Statistics 2025; NPR; American Journal of Managed Care. For personal guidance, talk to a licensed healthcare provider.