

# Prevention Co+olumn

MEN'S HEALTH – NOVEMBER 2020

## Men's health: Room for improvement

Although the determinants that influence health are gender neutral, there is a significant gap between the health status of men and women in Canada.

### OVERVIEW

- Life expectancy for Canadian men is **79.9 years**, compared to **84.1** for women.<sup>1</sup>
- Only 30% of people who turn to mental health services are male—while the occurrence of mental illness is equal among men and women.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly half of men age 40 and over are affected by erectile dysfunction to some degree.<sup>3</sup>
- Every year, approximately **20,000** Canadian men are diagnosed with prostate cancer.<sup>4</sup>



This prevention column is available for free download at:  
[viva.lacapitale.com](http://viva.lacapitale.com)



Workplace Health  
and Wellness Program

LaCapitale   
Insurance and Financial Services

# Snapshot of Canadian men's health

In 2018, the Minister of Health emphasized Canadian men are not as healthy as they could be:

## Data points to a grim picture:

- 29% are obese
- 82% don't exercise enough
- 76% don't follow a healthy diet
- 35% don't get enough sleep.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, the risk factor for poor health and developing chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure is higher among men than women.

## Harmful social standards

People often say men don't take their health seriously. That they'll put off seeing a doctor for a long time— sometimes too long. Well, it's a proven fact.

So why is it that men don't seek medical attention quickly? Social standards weigh heavily on their shoulders; these stem from values, perceptions and beliefs passed down through generations about the standard of masculinity. Some call it male pride, others a sense of weakness in a society that tends to value men for their strength, independence and performance.

In Quebec,<sup>6</sup> a study found that...

- 85% of men feel they can solve their problems on their own
- 45% feel annoyed if someone tries to help them when they are sad or worried
- 35% report that they are too proud to ask for help

It's no wonder men see health problems, however minor, as threats to their manhood and thus ignore their symptoms! ■



## Physical health: Challenges faced by men

Let's focus on aspects of men's health.

### Prostate: Severity varies, symptoms stay the same

The frequent need to urinate, a burning sensation, the presence of blood in the urine or semen, back pain... these are all red flags that mean it's time to see a doctor immediately. Often associated with a benign condition (prostatitis or hyperplasia), these symptoms sometimes indicate the presence of a tumour.

It's been estimated that approximately 1 in 9 Canadian men will develop prostate cancer. When detected early, the survival rate is close to 100%, but 3 out of 4 men will succumb to the disease if diagnosed late.<sup>7</sup>

### Erectile dysfunction

Often misconstrued as a lack of desire, difficulty attaining and maintaining an erection to achieve satisfying sexual activity can be detrimental to a couple's relationship and diminish their quality of life. It's estimated that nearly half of men over 40 suffer from erectile dysfunction to some degree.<sup>8</sup>

Causes vary but illness, medication, a heart condition, depression, stress, and fatigue are all factors liable to cause erectile dysfunction. The good news is there are solutions worth exploring, but to move forward, the first step is breaking the silence and speaking to a healthcare professional.

## Sources

1. Statistics Canada. Life expectancy at birth in 2017, and change in life expectancy (years) since 2016, by sex and province or territory [<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190530/t001d-eng.htm>] (Consulted on October 15, 2020).
2. Bayshore Healthcare Healthy Living Tips for Men [<https://www.bayshore.ca/2020/06/15/healthy-living-tips-for-men/>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
3. Clinique Marois urologue. La dysfonction érectile : statistiques... et solutions! [<https://www.lescliniquesmaroisurologue.ca/les-dysfonctionnements-erectiles-des-statistiques-et-des-solutions/>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
4. Canadian Cancer Society About Prostate Cancer, Statistics [<https://www.prostatecancer.ca/Prostate-Cancer/About-Prostate-Cancer/Statistics>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
5. Ginette Petitpas Taylore Statement, Men's Health Week 2018 [<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2018/06/mens-health-week.html>] (Consulted on July 30, 2020).
6. Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec Plan d'action ministériel – santé et bien-être des hommes 2017-2022, Gouvernement du Québec, p. 4 [<https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/document-001952/>], (Consulted on July 31, 2020).



## MENTAL HEALTH: STILL TOO MANY TABOOS

While psychological distress rates are equal among men and women, men are the ones who struggle to reach out for help. Only 30% of those who seek mental health services are male.<sup>12</sup> As a result, men wait until they are completely worn out before asking for help. And when they do, they are not always understood.<sup>13</sup>

Fear of being stigmatized and perceived as weak, the taboo around mental illness is so strong it's referred to as a silent epidemic. Left untreated, a mental illness is likely to get worse. In Canada, 11 people commit suicide every day— they are three times more likely to be men.<sup>14</sup>

### Warning signs

Family and friends play a key role and can help turn the tide. The feelings of sadness and despair that plague people with depression can manifest themselves in other ways for men:

- Sleep disorders
- Loss of interest and motivation
- Inability to focus
- Anger, irritability, aggressivity
- Overworking, alcohol, drugs

**GOOD TO KNOW :** Healthcare professionals are increasingly agreeing to see people who seek help after someone close to them makes an appointment on their behalf. ■

### Testicular cancer

Although less common than prostate cancer, testicular cancer affects approximately 1,000 men each year in Canada. Who are the most at risk? Young men between 15 to 29 years of age. As always, early detection is key. Men should get in the habit of performing regular testicular self-exams to detect any abnormality (redness, pain, lump, etc.). When a tumour is only found in one testicle (localized), the survival rate after five years is excellent (99%).<sup>9</sup>

### Heart disease

Canadian men are 79% more likely to die from heart disease than women.<sup>10</sup> The solution: regular exercise and a healthy diet with foods low in fat and sugars, and high in vegetables and fibre. Nothing new there, right? Still, men over 40 years old should get their cholesterol checked every three years to monitor their heart's health.

### Andropause: Myth or reality?

Officially recognized by the World Health Organization, andropause is equivalent to menopause in men. This means that between the ages of 45 and 65, the gradual decrease in testosterone levels can cause various symptoms:

- Decreased libido
- Irritability
- Restless sleep
- Hot flashes
- Muscle aches and pains
- Weight gains, especially around the waist

A visit to the doctor shouldn't be overlooked as andropause can increase the risk of developing more serious problems, such as osteoporosis and heart conditions. For relief, doctors may prescribe testosterone supplements.<sup>11</sup> ■

#### SOURCES (CONT.)

- Canadian Cancer Society About Prostate Cancer, Statistics [ <https://www.prostatecancer.ca/Prostate-Cancer/About-Prostate-Cancer/Statistics?lang=en-CA>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
- Cliniques Marois Urologue. La dysfonction érectile : statistiques... et solutions! [ <https://www.lescliniquesmaroisurologue.ca/les-dysfonctionnements-erectiles-des-statistiques-et-des-solutions/>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
- Groupe Proxim. Testicular Self Exams [ <https://www.groupeproxim.ca/en/article/testicular-cancer#>] (Consulted on July 30, 2020).
- Canadian Men's Health Foundation, Men's Health by the Numbers, [ <https://menshealthfoundation.ca/activity/mens-health-by-the-number/>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
- MedBroadcast Inc. Andropause: A Turning Point for Men [ <https://medbroadcast.com/healthfeature/gethealthfeature/andropause-a-turning-point-for-men/>] (Consulted on July 30, 2020).
- Bayshore Healthcare. Healthy Living Tips for Men [ <https://www.bayshore.ca/2020/06/15/healthy-living-tips-for-men/>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
- OGRODNICZUK, John, OLIFFE, John and collab. "Men's mental health, Can Fam Physician vol. 62(6) [ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4907567/#b5-062e284>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).
- Health Canada. Suicide in Canada: Key Statistics [ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/suicide-canada-key-statistics-infographic.html>] (Consulted on July 30, 2020).
- Canadian Men's Health Foundation, CMHF study of unhealthy habits makes waves in the media [ <https://menshealthfoundation.ca/activity/study-unhealthy-habits/>] (Consulted on August 20, 2020).

## Prioritizing healthy living

A healthy diet, regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, moderate alcohol consumption and not smoking are all simple behaviours that can extend men's life expectancy by as much as 12 years.<sup>15</sup> That's no small thing! But men need to start taking their health more seriously and be willing to ask for help before a problem gets out of hand. ■

