

## What are the threats to Men's health?

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"What are the biggest threats to Australian men's lives and how can you avoid them? The table below shows the 10 leading causes of death in Australian men in 2005. These 10 causes made up 57% of all male deaths." These I have shown at each of the last two Men's Health nights in Canberra.

Cause of Death	Number of deaths	Per cent of all male deaths
Heart attack and related disorders (coronary heart disease)	12433	18.5
Lung cancer	4694	7.0
Stroke (cerebrovascular disease)	4668	6.9
Other heart diseases	3249	4.8
Prostate cancer	2946	4.4
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	2832	4.2
Colorectal cancer	2330	3.5
Unknown primary site cancers	1785	2.7
Diabetes	1775	2.6
Suicide	1657	2.5

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. Australia's Health 2008. Cat. No. AUS 99. Canberra: AIHW.

The leading cause of death was coronary heart disease (heart attack and related disorders) and accounted for almost 1 in 5 male deaths. Lung cancer and cerebrovascular disease (stroke) were the two next most common causes.

Let's look at the big ticket items, in general, and over a series of articles. Cardiovascular disease is by no means restricted to the older age groups and I suspect we will see more premature cardiovascular disease in the next 20 to 30 years primarily based on the lifestyle of the presently young, an entirely preventable situation.

### Coronary heart disease

Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death in men and women. It is also a major cause of disability. The two major types are heart attack and angina.

The major personal risk factors for coronary heart disease are:

- Family history,
- Smoking,
- poor diet,
- lack of physical activity,
- being overweight or obese,

- high blood pressure,
- high cholesterol,
- diabetes, and
- high alcohol consumption

By choosing a healthy lifestyle, managing your

- cigarette smoking (if relevant),
- weight,
- blood pressure,
- cholesterol,
- keeping your blood sugar under control if you have diabetes, and

you can reduce your risk of coronary heart disease.

Have your blood pressure checked every 2 years or more often if you have additional risk factors.

Cholesterol tests should be done every 5 years from 45 years of age, unless you have additional risk factors. (I must admit I do these much earlier in men where there is evidence of a poor diet).

Talk to your GP about your level of risk, and what you can do about it. There are risk calculators which have been well tested.

I am often approached by patients to ask what they can do to prevent progress of high blood pressure and how to avoid (expensive) drug treatment. My advice is generally as follows:

- Reduce salt intake (be mindful of those snack foods which are laden with salt). Australians, in particular, seem to have a real taste for added salt.
- Reduce alcohol intake. I usually recommend that my patients have two alcohol free days per week and halve their present consumption; as a starting point – some have an intake which is quite high. Alcohol is, in the Australian community, a potent cause of raised blood pressure, in my opinion, and reduction can lead to reduction in blood pressure again in my experience.
- Exercise regularly – and follow the guidelines available everywhere, 30 minutes of exercise a day (see below)
- Address weight with dietary issues (in addition to exercise) – that is, reduce fats (particularly animal fats, and that means cheese too). Fat has twice as many calories (kilojoules) per given weight as does protein and carbohydrates.
- Read the labels when you are shopping – what amount of fat is in what you buy?

As stated in the M5 project:

“Regular physical activity reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, and has a positive effect on weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. The benefits of physical activity also include improvement in your mental health, weight loss/maintenance, arthritis, functional capacity and quality of life.

You will begin to notice the benefits soon after starting regular exercise, no matter what your age. Lasting health benefits can result even after maintaining activity for only two years.

It is recommended that adults should do 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, and ideally all days of the week. More vigorous exercise may have additional cardiovascular health and cancer prevention benefits, if carried out for a minimum of 30 minutes 3–4 times a week.

Moderate physical activity is activity that causes a slight, but noticeable, increase in your breathing and heart rate and may cause you to sweat a little.

Vigorous physical activity is exercise that leaves you puffing and makes it difficult to talk in full sentences between breaths. Talk to your GP before starting vigorous activity if you are not used to doing it."