

Men's health – a medical Freemason's offering

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This is one medical practitioner's opinion and draws on quoted sources. It is not meant to replace personal professional medical advice from your own GP or specialist. It is not an exhaustive presentation and there may be areas where additional information is required. Above all else, see your GP and if you do not have one, get one.

As a contribution to Freemasonry I thought I would bring to brethren's attention a men's health project known as the M5 Project and acknowledge this project at the outset as a valuable source of much of the information that will be used. In a series of articles I will attempt to summarise this important project for brethren and later cover one aspect per short article.

Firstly, what is all the fuss over men's health – our Grand Master is strongly behind the push for men's health in freemasonry, and men in general, and he joins with many other medical practitioners, and members of the health community, to try to prevent disease and illness in men. Why? Simply put, as stated in the M5 project: "Sadly, five of us die each hour from preventable conditions. That could be our fathers, our friends or sons. You may have already experienced the premature death of someone close to you through heart disease, depression or other preventable conditions. It is time for this to stop".

"The M5 Project is not about money. It is not about research. It is not even about a medical cure. It is about our minds. Changing our thinking to say "I believe in my health". To get it through to our subconscious that it is OK to talk about health with our mates, and important to know and trust a local doctor to look out for us."

"Our relationships with our friends and family are just so valuable. We owe it to them to look after our health – and help others see how they can take just five preventative steps. The M5 Project is a movement. A diverse group of people, like you, focused on ensuring men live long and rich lives. All they need is a little bit of knowledge and direction from a mate who cares."

"The M5 project aims are simple and straightforward. As a start, men can take five preventive steps:

- Share your family history with your GP, (implicit in this is get a GP)
- Know your healthy weight,
- Check your blood pressure,
- Stop smoking – it's the only health option,
- Maintain a healthy mind and a healthy body."

None of this is rocket science and it is not too hard to do, it needs men to look at the facts and actively address them without excuses. Disease and disease progress pays no attention to excuses.

These then are the project aims of the M5 Project.

Sharing your family history with your GP is an important first step, as many diseases run in families. This is particularly important for those conditions for which there is a readily available treatment, for example, cardiovascular disease or for those in which there are acceptable preventative measures.

In this series of articles I will address a number of conditions all of which are part of the M5 Project which is now being addressed to, and by, men across Australia.

Family History

I would like to address a few comments on the importance of the family history. There were known, for the history buffs, for many, many years certain diseases which had genetically based inheritance, often through notable families such as Royal families. I refer to the bleeding disorders and some rarer forms of biochemical diseases, the porphyrias. Certain other diseases are known to impact the lives of certain ethnic groups on the basis of genetics.

The recent advances in the studies of genetics which have been enabled by research and in particular the human genome project have given us a much greater understanding of the role of genetics in diseases in families. The importance of the family history (where known) allows the GP to be able to make informed judgments on an individual's risk of such chronic conditions as heart disease, several cancers, diabetes, osteoporosis (and yes it does affect men) and mental illness to name a few. The family history of shared chronic conditions not only represents the effect of shared genes but also environmental and behavioral factors as well as stated in The Australian Genetics Resource for General Practitioners. Do not be surprised if your GP wants to go back in your family history a number of generations and draws a family tree.

If we look at cancer in families then we see multiple close relatives on the same side of the family with cancers of the same or related type. Examples of this are the now well known colon cancers and for a number of men, prostate cancer. It is even believed (and there is some evidence to support this belief) that there is an inherited genetic abnormality that predisposes to the risk of melanoma in up to about 5% of this cancer.

In heart disease we know the problems of high cholesterol and blood pressure and there is a genetic involvement for these, and rarer forms of cardiac disease, and importantly something can be done about prevention of the consequences of cholesterol and high blood pressure.

These simple examples give some of the reasons for sharing your family history with your GP; it is important to enable the GP to look at issues that may be pertinent in the overall management of your health.