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Dear Friends,

On May 13, 2015, the Women's Health Research Institute launched the Illinois Men's Health Registry! The Illinois Men's Health Registry is an online database that records confidential information on men's health and matches willing participants to ongoing research studies and trials. The registry will aid researchers in preventing disease and improving health conditions in men. The registry does not focus on any one disease or condition, but rather we invite all individuals to provide information that could help scientists learn more about chronic conditions, lifestyle behaviors, and sex differences.

This month's e-newsletter provides an overview of men's health and can help educate you and your loved ones on living happy, healthy lives!

Sincerely,

The Institute Staff

Men’s Health

There are over 150 million men in the United States, and 12% of these men are labeled as having fair or poor health. Maintaining a healthy balance includes paying
attention to your physical, mental, and emotional health. This newsletter equips you with information on men and heart disease, nutrition and exercise, and cancer--some of the leading health concerns for men. Take time to evaluate your own health status to ensure you're making the right choices for your lifestyle!

**Men and Heart Disease**

The heart is a vital organ, it pumps oxygen and nutrient-rich blood to the body in order to sustain life. In order to do so, the human heart beats 100,000 times a day and pumps around 2,000 gallons of blood throughout the body each day. The heart is one of the most important organs in the human body and therefore our heart health is crucial.

Heart disease is an umbrella term used to describe a range of conditions that can affect your heart, including arrhythmias, coronary artery disease, heart attack, and congenital heart defects, among others. The leading cause of death for men in the United States is heart disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 1 in every 4 male deaths is due to heart disease and between 70-89% of cardiac events occur in men.

Unfortunately, there are not always warning signs of heart disease and the first sign is often a heart attack or stroke. However, there are a few early signs that can help you recognize heart problems. These include: difficulty breathing after moderate physical activity, discomfort in your chest lasting anywhere from half an hour to a few hours, unexplained pain in your upper torso, neck, or jaw, and changes in your extremities. These can be signs of the narrowing of blood vessels, making it difficult for your heart to pump oxygenated blood throughout your body.

Risk factors for developing heart disease include: age, family history, smoking, a poor diet, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and a lack of physical activity. It is important to inform your doctors if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, or a family history of heart disease, as these can put you at a higher risk of developing problems with your heart.

There are risk factors that you can control to make yourself less likely to be affected by heart disease. Choosing to stop smoking can have benefits for your health. The nicotine that enters your body when you smoke constricts your blood vessels and the carbon monoxide damages the inner lining of these vessels. A poor diet, including food that is high in salt, fat, sugar, and cholesterol, can increase the risk of formation of plaques clogging your arteries and can lead to numerous heart diseases. The next section discusses ways you can improve your exercise and eating habits, which can have lasting impacts on your heart health!
Nutrition and Exercise

Only 53% of men over 18-years-old met the most recent federal physical activity guidelines for aerobic activity and almost 35% of men over 20-years-old are obese. Maintaining healthy exercise and nutrition routines is essential for men to live healthier lives. High blood pressure is often the culprit for dangerous repercussions from unhealthy habits. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls, and high blood pressure means the pressure in your arteries is above the normal range.

Eating certain foods and gaining weight can increase your blood pressure, while making healthy choices to lose weight and eat better foods can have the ability to lower your blood pressure. It's wiser to eat foods lower in fat, salt, and calories, avoid foods such as fried foods, salty snacks, and butter--as these have been found to increase blood pressure. In comparison, choosing to eat lean meats, fruits and vegetables instead may help lower your blood pressure, putting less strain on your body. Furthermore, compared to people who eat only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, men who eat more generous amounts are likely to have reduced risk of chronic disease.

Maintaining a regular exercise routine is just as important for men as choosing healthy foods. The American Heart Association recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least 5 days a week to remain physically healthy. If you're looking to lower your blood pressure, 40 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise 4 times a week is recommended. Being physically active is essential in preventing heart disease and stroke. Alternating a cardio-based workout (such as running or swimming) with weight lifting can ensure you shed fat and build muscle in a healthy way. Not sure where to start? Check out these 25 Tips and Strategies for Exercise in Men.

Men and Cancer
Sometimes, despite our best efforts to remain healthy, we can develop cancerous cells. Cells are the building blocks of the body. Normally, cells grow and divide to make new ones as the body needs them—this, however, breaks down when cancer develops. Cancer starts when cells in a particular part of the body begin to grow out of control—instead of dying, these cells continue to divide and form new, abnormal cells. These extra cells form tumors, which can invade nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body. Cancer affects both men and women, and it is important to know which cancers you may be at risk for. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the most common cancers that affect men are prostate, colon, and lung cancer.

Prostate cancer is one of the most common cancers among men. The prostate gland is found only in males and it is located below the bladder in front of the rectum. Its job is to produce fluid that protects and nourishes sperm cells in semen. Some signs and symptoms of prostate cancer include issues with urination, blood in the urine, erectile dysfunction, weakness in the legs or feet, or loss of bladder or bowel control. The chances of developing prostate cancer increase as men get older: most prostate cancers occur in men over 65 years old. It is recommended that men begin talking to their doctors about the pros and cons of testing for prostate cancer at age 50.

Colon cancer begins in the colon, which is part of the large intestine in the digestive system. The colon has two functions: first it absorbs both water and salt from the food matter that pass through the large intestine, and second, it stores waste stool before it passes into the rectum. The colon is made up of many layers, and cancer in this part of the body starts with a polyp, or a small growth on the innermost layer that can begin to grow outwards. Symptoms include changes in bowel habits, rectal bleeding or blood in the stool, persistent abdominal pain, and unexplained weight loss. It is recommended that people begin screenings for colon cancer at age 50. Testing can be done to find polyps before they even become cancerous and removal of these polyps can prevent cancer from developing.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for men in the United States. While people who smoke have the highest risk of developing lung cancer, people who do not smoke can also develop lung cancer. The most common signs and symptoms include chronic cough, coughing up blood, shortness of breath, chest pain, wheezing, and weight loss. If you do smoke, your risk for developing lung cancer can greatly decrease by quitting!

While there is no surefire way to prevent these different kinds of cancers, there are important lifestyle choices that you can make in order to lower your risk of developing cancer. These include not smoking, getting regular exercise, eating healthy foods, and limiting alcohol intake.
Sources

- American Cancer Society
- Nation Cancer Institute
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Mayo Clinic
- Cleveland Clinic
- American Heart Association
- WebMD
- Healthline

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Institute Happenings

The Executive Director of the Women's Health Research Institute, Sharon Green, retired at the end of May after years of dedicated service to women's health. Sharon Green is a true health activist who has had a remarkable career improving the lives of women. Throughout her career, Sharon has worked at three academic medical centers, a total of six colleges and universities, several non-profit organizations, and has served as the founding Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health's Office of Women's Health. Her passion for women's health and the importance of including sex dimorphisms in research has made her an irreplaceable asset at the WHRI.

While working at the Women's Health Research Institute, Sharon has launched countless programs, press releases, blogs, publications, and public policy initiatives that have been instrumental in improving women's health research and care. We commemorate her lifetime achievements as a leader in women's health activism!
Illinois Men's Health Registry

The Women's Health Research Institute is excited to launch the Illinois Men's Health Registry! The registry is an online database that records confidential information on men's health and matches willing participants to ongoing research studies and trials. The registry will aid researchers in preventing disease and improving health conditions in men. The registry does not focus on any one disease or condition, but rather we invite all individuals to provide information that could help scientists learn more about chronic conditions, lifestyle behaviors and sex differences.

If you are interested in joining the Illinois Men's Health Registry today, click here!

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, June 9, 12:00pm-1:00pm: The Women's Health Research Institute's monthly research forum featuring Dr. Melinda Ring presenting "Ecotherapy, Medicinal Plants and Food as Medicine" will take place in Prentice Women's Hospital, 3rd floor, Conference Room L South.

Due to the popularity of this topic, the forum registration has reached its maximum capacity, but please contact megan.castle@northwestern.edu if you would like to be put on the waiting list for this event.