



When it Comes to Men's Health, Information Can Lead to Action

The facts are shocking: nearly 30,000 men will die from prostate cancer in 2004; 2.5 million men don't know that they have diabetes; and more than half of all men have not had a physical exam or blood cholesterol test in the past year.

Given these statistics, it's no wonder that men are at greater risk for getting sick and for dying at a younger age than women do. Even worse, every year millions of men with heart disease, depression, diabetes and other serious medical problems go undiagnosed and untreated.

However, if men pay attention to the health information right in front of them – on the Internet, at local health fairs, on the TV news, from friends and family and in direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertisements for prescription medicines – they may be able to improve their health.

Some people may ignore advertisements for prescription medicines, but studies have reported that prescription medicine ads are making a difference by informing people about medical conditions and treatment options so they can take action and make better healthcare decisions with their doctors. According to a survey published by Harvard Medical School and Harris Interactive, nearly 11 million patients who discussed prescription medicines ads during a physician visit were diagnosed with an important medical condition.

Prescription medicine ads have helped men like Mort, president of a news talent placement business in Michigan, take charge of their health. Mort found an ad helpful in making an informed decision about how to best manage his high cholesterol. Mort knew he had a family history of heart disease and high cholesterol, so he had already discussed prescription medicines to lower his cholesterol with his doctor. But, he did not like the idea of taking medication and decided to try diet and exercise.

Later, when Mort noticed a magazine ad for a cholesterol-lowering medicine, he took a second look. Mort discussed the medicine with his doctor and also felt better about his doctor prescribing medicine, which was the appropriate treatment.

The medicine, combined with healthy eating and exercise, has lowered Mort's cholesterol to a safer level. "The prescription medicine ad, as well as the conversations I had with my doctor helped me be proactive about taking care of myself," Mort said.

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, asthma affects an estimated 17 million Americans and each year, nearly 500,000 Americans are hospitalized and more than 5,000 die from asthma. Fortunately, asthma is a treatable and manageable condition. While there are a variety of treatments available, each patient responds differently to different medicines.

Rich, a police officer in Illinois, has had asthma since he was a child. Over the years, he's worked closely with his doctor to try several asthma treatments, but he's always felt that none of the treatments worked "100 percent." After seeing a prescription medicine ad in the newspaper for a different asthma treatment, Rich asked his doctor about the medication. The doctor was open to discussing different treatment options and agreed that the advertised medicine might offer Rich additional relief.

Rich has used the advertised treatment for several months and his asthma symptoms are being controlled better than before. "I really just thought asthma problems were something I'd have to deal with my whole life, but I am glad I took the time to learn about other options," Rich said.

Like Mort and Rich, many men are finding that if they take the time to pay attention to health information, they can manage their chronic conditions and hopefully prevent more serious medical problems from arising in the future.

Health information is playing a vital role in making men aware of important medical conditions and in motivating them to better manage their healthcare. And, health information helps strengthen the ties between doctors and patients. When men have the tools they need to talk to their doctors about symptoms, they can lead healthier, better lives.

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