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What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

By: Caroline Tapp-McDougall

Listen up men. I want to talk about **health**. Yeah, your **health**, and the fact that the very topic you may be ignoring could come back to haunt you. I've learned some interesting facts about males and their **health**. For example, when ill, men are more likely than women to delay seeking medical care. Men may be less 'aware' of their **health**, making them less in tune with their own risks and needs. They are less likely to follow doctor's orders.

A Statistics Canada report published a few years ago backs me up. 'How **Healthy** are Canadians?' offers some eyeopening insights. Here are a few excerpts from the document:

Health Behaviour

- Nutrition: Research shows that women were more concerned about maintaining or improving health through food choice than men. For example, more women reported that they looked at the fat, cholesterol, and calorie content when choosing foods. D
- rinking: Men are almost twice as likely as women to drink alcohol on a weekly basis. And the proportion of people consuming alcohol regularly rose with household income, implying that employees in management or higher positions may be at risk.

Stress

- Personal stress: The stress from work, family, and social commitments may alter the body's immune response and increase susceptibility to diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. And stress may prompt changes in health behaviour as male employees try to cope. For example, someone under pressure may begin to drink more alcohol.
- Chronic conditions: Although the prevalence of most chronic conditions and diseases is higher in woman, men are at particular risk for certain conditions. For example, diabetes is more common among males, perhaps due to the higher prevalence of overweight/obese men.

Healthcare Use

- Physician visits: Research shows that men use healthcare services less frequently than women do. Females are also more likely than males to have had consultations about their emotional health, or with an alternative healthcare provider.
- Medication use: During the course of a month, a majority of Canadians take some type of over-the-counter and/or prescription medication. While overall usage is similar between the sexes, for each specific medication a higher percentage of females reported use.

What's A Man To Do?

So what does this research mean for HR professionals? Whether it's a fear of the unknown or a desire to be the strong, silent type, men are putting themselves at risk for greater problems when they push healthcare out of mind. And when it comes to health problems – especially important topics such as prostate cancer, diabetes, and heart disease – men can do a great deal to protect themselves.

Male employees can help themselves in two ways – by getting to know their family doctor and by understanding what conditions are more likely to affect them. Let me elaborate.

The first way any man can help himself is by getting to know his family doctor. That means showing up for the annual physical and getting any symptoms or ailments checked out early on – not one year later when they ‘finally get the time.’

Doctors and other healthcare providers can also provide information and support when an employee is trying to make a lifestyle change, which could include changes in eating, drinking, sleeping, or being active.

The second thing men can do is understand what conditions are most likely to affect them. Here’s a list of some of those diseases:

- heart disease
- malignant neoplasms (cancers)
- cerebrovascular disease
- chronic lower respiratory disease
- diabetes

Take Care

So all male employees should pay attention, and take care. They can learn more about the links between diet and disease, avoid binge drinking and other potentially harmful practices, visit their doctors more often, and learn about the various health conditions that could sneak up on them.

By taking charge, your male employees will be better able to make the most of their health and live long, fruitful lives.

Caroline Tapp-McDougall is the publisher of *Solutions: Canada’s Family Guide to Home Health Care and Wellness* and the author of *The Complete Canadian Eldercare Guide*.