

MAN matters

Health isn't always a man's number one priority, but there are six essential check-ups every guy needs. **ANDY WELCH** books himself in for an MOT

It's fair to say most men (myself included) avoid thinking about health until something seems drastically wrong.

Of course, that's not a particularly sensible attitude and with figures for diabetes, heart disease and other potentially life-threatening ailments continually on the rise, it's about time us men changed our tune. But what should we really be concerned about?

DIABETES

Dr Ian Campbell, a Nottingham-based GP and director of TheDietPlate.co.uk, says diabetes is top of the list.

"The first thing is to identify whether you're at risk," he begins. "If there's a family history of Type 2 diabetes (the non-insulin dependant, adult-onset form), you could be at risk. Being overweight and not getting much physical activity are both factors too.

"Diabetes tends to present itself over several weeks. Symptoms include increasing thirst (polydipsia), increasing need to go to the toilet (polyuria), weight loss and tiredness."

If you experience any of the above, Dr Campbell recommends a visit to your GP or pharmacist. Getting checked out couldn't be simpler. A test for diabetes involves sampling the amount of sugar in your urine and you can buy kits from the chemist. Most pharmacies will also check blood sugar levels.

HEART DISEASE

"Men who are overweight, have a family history of heart disease, are smokers and/or heavy drinkers, are all at risk," Dr Campbell continues. "Get your blood pressure checked. Under the age of 40, once every three years is enough. Over 40, you should have it checked every other year and over 50, every 12 months."

You should also have your cholesterol checked and report any concerns about breathlessness or chest pains to your doctor.

Dr Ian Campbell

TESTICULAR CANCER

"The best advice I can give is for men to know their own testicles," says Dr Campbell. "You need to know what they feel like so you know when there's a change."

PROSTATE DISEASE

The prostate is a gland found only in males. An enlargement of the gland will affect about 50 per cent of men over 50. In its benign state, it means frequent trips to the toilet to pass small amounts of urine.

In its malignant state, however, it must be checked out. There are simple blood tests available so if you develop changes in your urinary habits, get it looked at.

ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION

Impotence – manifesting itself in a loss of sexual appetite, an inability to perform or problems achieving and maintaining an erection – is an increasing problem due to modern lifestyles.

"The causes can be stress, anxiety, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, prescribed medication, a complication of types of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease," says Dr Campbell.

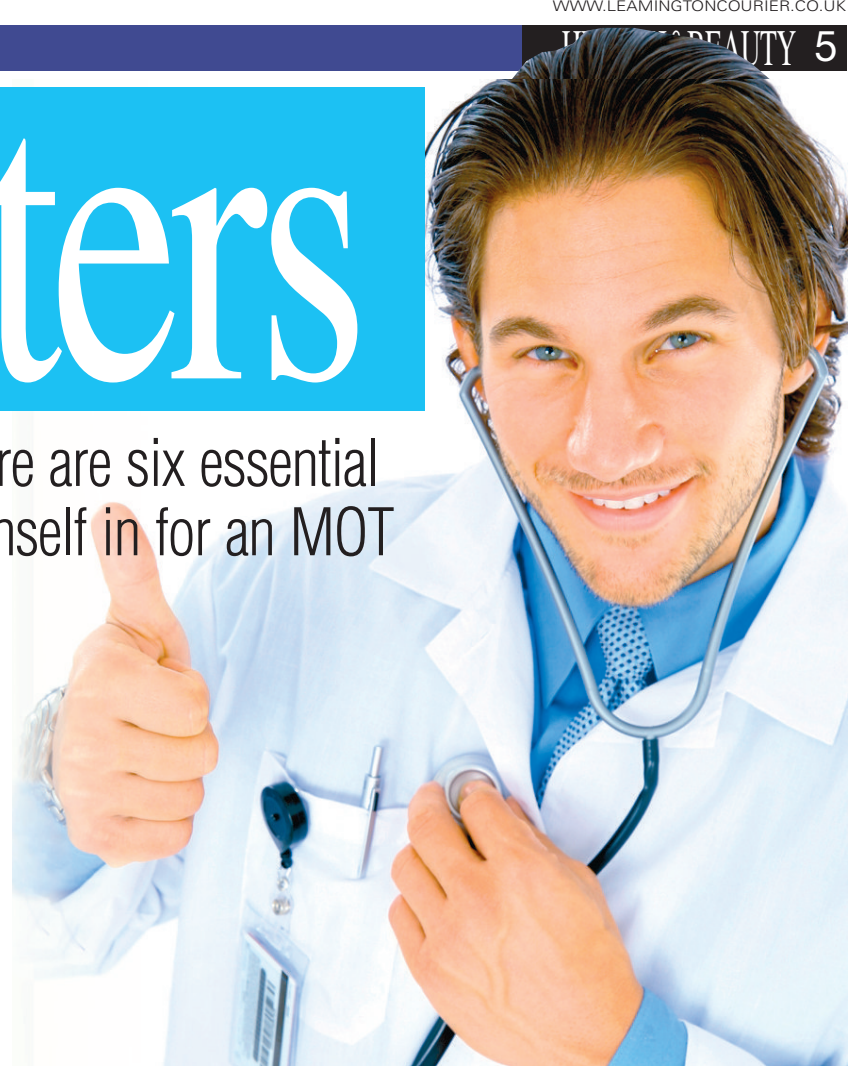
"In younger men, it's often psychological. In older men, it may well be physical, so improving your lifestyle, getting your blood pressure down and stopping smoking can have a big effect. There are also medications GPs can prescribe for the problem if necessary."

TESTOSTERONE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME

"Men aged between 40 and 60 have an eight per cent chance of having testosterone levels below the normal range – a condition called testosterone deficiency syndrome (TDS) – as a result of underactive testicles," says GP and medical consultant Dr Sarah Brewer.

Male testosterone levels fall naturally by around one per cent per year from middle age, with Type 2 diabetics most at risk at any age.

If you're 40 or older and have a decreased libido, a lack of energy, less strong erections and are miserable or grumpy, you could have TDS. The best advice is to talk to your doctor.



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