

Man maintenance

Men's Health Week became an international event when six men's health organisations came together in 2002 at The World Congress on Men's Health in Vienna. The now International Men's Health Week (IMHW) is most widely observed in Australia, Canada, the US and Europe, but more recently, particularly in the field of sexual and reproductive health, there has been collaboration in Central and South America as well as Asia and Africa.

Coincidentally, at the time of IMHW this year (10-16 June), *Andrology Australia* is launching "A Healthy Body Begins Here" campaign which highlights the links between reproductive health disorders and general health. It's a reminder that talking to your doctor about reproductive health concerns may identify a more serious underlying health condition.

Of course, the topic of men's health should not be confined to discussion of conditions such as erectile dysfunction, prostate problems, testicular cancer, male infertility or male pattern baldness; more general health issues such as heart disease, diabetes and bowel cancer are of critical importance.

There are some alarming statistics regarding men's health. More than 40% of Australian men over 40 suffer a serious health problem. Men under 75 years of age are almost three times more likely to die from so-called cardiovascular disease than women in the same age group; and, in men, alcohol misuse results in about 3,000 deaths and 65,000 hospitalisations every year.

According to the *Men's Health Australia* website, compared with women, Australian men of all ages are less healthy and, therefore, do not enjoy as good a quality of life as they should. All chronic conditions such as obesity, cancer, diabetes and heart disease occur more frequently in men.

In the past hundred years things have improved. A male born in 2010 can expect to live 24 years longer than one born in 1901; but still the life expectancy of men is nearly five years less than that of women.

It probably comes as no surprise to learn that men generally indulge in more risky behaviour than do women; and this behaviour pattern has been the case for many centuries.

Perhaps this is one reason why men don't last quite as long as women. Compared with women, men are much more likely to die in accidents – traffic or work-related accidents – and be the victims of homicide or suicide. But the fact that some men occasionally behave quite badly is not the only reason that in Australia women live longer than men. This five year gap is quite common in other parts of the world as well; but the reason differs from country to country.

So, when young Australian men survive their aggressive adolescence, they are still more likely to indulge in dangerous lifestyle pursuits – smoking, eating and drinking to excess and exercising too little

It's fair to say that women appear to have biological advantages over men; women seem to have a stronger immune system; and the hormone oestrogen protects against heart disease and stroke – at least until after the menopause.

However, men are less inclined to visit the doctor, both when they are ill, or just to have a regular check-up. They're very much aware of the need for motor vehicle or other machinery maintenance, but ignore the need to protect their bodies from abuse, misuse or age-related deterioration.

In attempting to close that five year gap, all men, and women who care about them, could check out the series of men's health fact cards. They're available from all pharmacies around Australia providing the Self Care health information. For the nearest location call the Pharmaceutical Society (PSA) on 1300 369 772 or log on to the PSA website at www.psa.org.au. Click on "Self Care", then "Use the Self Care Pharmacy Finder".