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Ladies, Are You Really Taking Care of Your Man?

By Stephen J. Busalacchi, Wisconsin Author

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Women live about five years longer than men, but is it really all just a biological advantage? You might be surprised to learn that men visit physician offices for preventive exams at about half the rate of women.

“From adolescence, girls are programmed to visit their doctor once a year for a pelvic exam, and in the course of that visit, what actually happens is a lot of primary care,” explains Robert Alt, MD, a Wisconsin internist. Doctor Alt, who is Director of the Men’s Health Service for Dean Health in Madison, has made it his mission to improve the lives of his male patients by trying to balance the odds for them. What that means is strongly encouraging men to come in for annual exams. Women can be very influential in making that happen, and any efforts in that regard can pay-off tremendously in better health and a longer life for the male patient.

“I almost never fail to make an intervention that may be life-saving,” he says. Alt may convince his male patient to do such things as taking aspirin every day, exercising more or improving his diet.

But it’s an up hill battle trying to convince men to get serious about their health. To neglect one’s health, is thought to be macho, according to Dr. Alt. And he says society only reinforces that myth with misplaced slogans. “If it works, don’t fix it. Don’t sweat the small stuff.” When it comes to your health, those kinds of attitudes are what lead to serious health conditions that might well have been prevented.

Alt says “women play a vital role” in getting their men to come in for visits. “Otherwise, they have to suffer their male partner’s decline.” At minimum, he says women have to put up with hearing their partner whine. Worse yet, they have to live without them later in life.

“What we need is a major educational effort to get guys to come in,” adds Dr. Alt. “We need institutions to make a commitment to see men at a frequency that we’re seeing women at.”

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Stephen J. Busalacchi is a medical journalist and author of *White Coat Wisdom: Extraordinary doctors talk about what they do, how they got there, and why medicine is so much more than a job.* © 2008 See www.whitecoatwisdom.com.

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