



## Pharmacy Self Care Health Facts Column

By John Bell - 20 August 2008

No.1115

### Men's health – lifestyle issues the crux of the problem

The recent visit to Australia by Pope Benedict had special significance for Christian world youth. However, it's now suggested that a different form of cross may have particular health benefit for adult men.

Studies have shown that diets rich in cruciferous vegetables (so-called because of their four petalled, cruciform or cross-like flowers) may reduce the risk and severity of prostate cancer. The studies were carried out with broccoli, but other members of the cruciferous or cabbage family such as bok choy, sprouts, cauliflower, radish and rocket may all have similar protective effects.

Of course there could be even more benefits. These vegetables seem to have it all. They're loaded with vitamins, fibre and disease fighting phytochemicals – confirming the fact that the greengrocer is the real health food store.

Nevertheless, simply eating fresh fruit and vegetables won't solve all men's health problems. Just getting men to recognise the signs and symptoms of disease and ill health, and convincing them to see their doctor can be quite a challenge.

Men generally understand the need for regular maintenance of their motor vehicles; mostly they're also keen to look after their golf clubs, their fishing gear or their photographic equipment. But they're not so good at looking after themselves.

Almost certainly, it's because women are so necessarily involved with childbirth and the subsequent raising of children, but it's also most likely because of the prominence given to women's health issues in the last two generations that women have a greater awareness of the need for both self care and appropriate seeking of health professional advice.

However, the stimulus for raising the profile of men's health has come from what might be considered an unlikely source. For about a decade now various men's health issues have been slowly becoming more newsworthy. Perhaps it's the F word that has put cooking guru, Gordon Ramsay, on the map, but it's the V word that has put men's health in the spotlight.

It's just 10 years ago that *Viagra* gained marketing approval for erectile dysfunction (ED), and it's now a multi-billion dollar product worldwide. Maybe there's some irony in that *Viagra*, then known as compound UK-92, 480 and later by the generic name sildenafil, was first investigated as a possible treatment for high blood pressure and angina.

Whilst it's early promise of providing benefits in these conditions was never realised, it's widely published success in treating ED has meant more men are consulting their GPs; and more men are getting that much needed regular medical examination; and possibly more men are getting effective medication for their high blood pressure.

Heart and blood vessel disease, known medically as cardiovascular disease or CVD, is the leading cause of death in Australia. And, up to the age of 75, men are two to three times more likely to die of CVD than women.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol levels are two of the major preventable risk factors for CVD. For these risk factors, regular medication is often an essential part of therapy. However, other preventable risk factors include smoking, physical inactivity, overweight/obesity and poor nutrition – all factors where simple behaviour change can make a significant difference.

Lifestyle changes are not easy for anyone to make, and men are definitely no easy subjects. Men drink more than women, smoke more than women, are more overweight and particularly if living alone, have a poorer nutritional status. But even small changes could lead to big benefits.

This month, pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information are concentrating on issues relating to men's health.

There are Self Care cards on *Erectile Dysfunction*, *Prostate Problems* and a general one on *Men's Health*. As well the cards on *Diabetes*, *High Blood Pressure*, *Fat and Cholesterol*, *Alcohol*, *Smoking*, *Sleeping Problems* and *Depression* will all have special relevance for men.

High profile celebrities suffering prostate cancer have made this topic easier for men to discuss. The benefits of screening for prostate cancer are arguable; but we do know that prostate cancer can be cured if detected and treated early.

Meanwhile you can check out the fact cards at one of the 2,000 Self Care pharmacies around Australia – phone the Pharmaceutical Society on 1300 369 772 for the nearest location – and don't forget to tuck into your vegies!