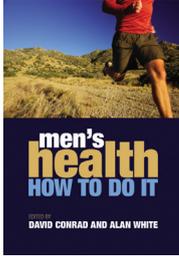


## Men's Health - How to do it



**Editors:** David Conrad and Alan White

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### صحة الرجال - كيف الوصول إليها؟

المؤلفون: ديفيد كونارد والآن وايت

**I**N THE AGE OF EMERGING OBJECTIFICATION OF the male gender, perhaps heralding female hegemony but yet in patrilineal terrains, there is a consensus that masculinity may be a curse in disguise. Consider the headlines: females are outshining males in college entrance examinations and a jobbo is seen as the archetypal source of all social ills. In the medical fraternity, the trend is catching on fast. Academic publishers are churning out books on men's health. The message is becoming clear: modern males are either an endangered species or endangering the status quo of the world. Unless rescue measures are undertaken, the consequences will be dire. Imagine the world without males? Even in matrilineal societies this idea appears to be an alarming proposition.

David Conrad and Alan White have edited *Men's Health: How to Do It*. The volume is mantled with the assumption that typical macho cholos, or so called 'Y chromosome owners' are reluctant to seek care in medical settings. Males tend to abhor hospitals, hiding their miseries in vanity. In the final analysis, the inevitable would become inevitable. Being both reluctant to introspect and resistant to external pressure, males are in the top of the list of those who fall prey to many types of ill-health. This is testified to by the silent epidemic of male gender related diseases, disabilities and untimely deaths often occurring at tender ages.

With various authors contributing to the 16 chap-

ters, Conrad and White have produced a 'dirty hands manual' offering tips on how to approach males about health and educate them to curb the negative sequelae of their masculine lifestyles. The manual is divided into three parts with ample summary boxes, vignettes and cartoon-like illustrations; reader friendly tables and figures are also available. In the spirit of simplicity, the chapters are embedded with subheadings. Some sections are narrated with questions and answers. The first part of the volume comes with a catchy title: "Men's health – What's it all about?" Part two of the book starts with abbreviations that have not cropped up earlier, but still within the spirit of simplicity. Some 'hints' and 'warnings' are highlighted on many pages. Fancy titles have not been spared either, including: "Erectile dysfunction and male incontinence clinics", "Sex and relationship education in schools with boys". These chapters are a mishmash of information with antics like 'anti-bullying work'. The final part, far from being anti-climax, describes the history of men's health. Some tips and personal testimonies on how to be a men's health worker are vividly chronicled. The impression is given that *Men's Health* should be supplied as a standard manual for health workers. The theme of the volume is obviously orthogonal to Arnold Schwarzenegger's image of macho masculinity.

Like anything in life, there is the other side of the story but, for this volume, it is not hyperbole. The

writing is simple but, like Sudoku, one needs to be very attentive to grasp the flow of information. Many abbreviations crop up without explanation. Despite its practical application, the book overlooks the role of women in the lives of men. Therefore it disregards the statement that behind every strong man is a stronger woman. Another source of attrition is the explicit 'medicalisation' of all that it takes to be a 'Y chromosome owner'. Medicalisation is a sociological concept that misconstrues mundane characteristics such as baldness or socially constructed misbehaviours as 'diseases' which should naturally call for medical attention. From this perspective, the volume fails to differentiate between social deviance, illness and endowments that are natural to man. Isn't masculinity and all that it entails part and parcel of the Y chromosome? But why should the blueprint of masculinity be medicalised? To paraphrase Arthur Schopenhauer, isn't struggling with difficulties as natural to a man as grubbing in the ground to a mole? Related to medicalisation, there emerges the issue of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As social psychologists would confess, if negative labels are assigned to certain traits of masculinity, even a wrong assumption about a particular event or behaviour can breed itself into a new entity that is consistent with the original faulty assumption. What is often overlooked in this context is that the behaviour of modern day 'Y chromosome owners' may be deeply rooted in socialisation forces. In many paternalistic societies, boys are differently socialised. In the Arab part of the world, daredevil (*shuja'a*) masculine behaviour is encouraged by society. This view echoes the Roman philosopher, Marcus Cicero's, notion that "a man's chief quality is courage". In such an atmosphere, risk taking or, in its

extreme form poor impulse control, is paradoxically intrinsically sanctioned. It is no wonder therefore that men, with their socially patterned risk taking propensities, are likely to succumb to drug addiction and other health risky behaviours. Therefore, unless Wordsworth's euphemism, "the child is father of the man" is considered as a part of the equation, all the efforts to curb the dark side of masculinity would likely to end in vain or as empty rhetoric. Finally, although the volume should be applauded for its audacity in formulating the protocol for addressing male problems, scant attention is paid to methods of measuring the outcomes of such an undertaking.

Who should read this book? The authors unabashedly propose that all healthcare professionals, health managers or simply all aspirants in the emerging field of men's health should read this volume. The strength of this book is that it is a manual filled with anecdotes, cartoons and, for brevity, at the end of each chapter references, an index and appendices are provided to consolidate the message. The manual does not pretend to be anything more than a practical approach to the development and implementation of a men's health program for the situation in the UK. Unlike other previous approaches, the message has ecological validity in that it aims to reach the culprits on their own turf, be it in the tavern or on the football pitch.

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