

CHANGING MEN, CHANGING TIMES

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Bookstores are usually loaded with sections on women and their health. But when I asked a bookshop if they had anything on men's issues, the reply was "God, I don't know. Look under mental illness or self-help". When I asked for the men's section in Cambridge, UK, I was taken to the section on pornography.

The old script for men was simple. Perform, protect, provide. That meant, work hard, most of your life. Protect your loved ones - and usually that meant your wife and children. And provide food, clothing and shelter for them. If they could get some time off, men would play sport, go to the pub, and grab what sex they could.

There were a few problems with this. One result was that men didn't have much time to think about their health. They put off visiting doctors; they wouldn't bother with healthy eating; they had simple ideas about relationships.

A new book shows us how far men have changed and are changing. Greg Millan's book is written in very simple, plain language, intended for the average Joe and his partner. It encompasses an enormous range of topics. For a start, we learn about the usual suspects: prostate health, skin cancer and healthy hearts. There is heaps more. I was pleasantly surprised at the range of additional subjects: relationships, being happy, grief, acupuncture, exercise; it goes on. Greg has kindly included a couple of pages I wrote on how fathers should raise a son.

What kind of approaches to health are we talking about? If men are not using health and counseling services, is that the fault of men, or the services? Greg suggests both could improve the way they relate to each other. I am glad there are many services targeted to women. But we could do so much more for men. It is still hard for men in crisis to get good help. Doctors are busy and often expensive: I abandoned one specialist who was charging me \$600 for a one hour visit. I don't think much of the services aimed at depression, nor the helplines. Greg says we must help men better deal with services, and encourage services to deal better with men.

Should men go for traditional health, or Eastern medicine? Greg says, use both. Like many others with back pain and osteoarthritis, I find the local GP's help is limited. "Take a pain-killer and rest" is the usual suggestion. It's been far more productive for me to seek out people who actively solve the problem. I work out with a specialized trainer, use a smart young osteopath, and swim in cold sea water. Acupuncture and massage have also been useful. Greg's book suggests a range of solutions, mainly acupuncture/ osteopathy and exercise.

Thinking about men's health includes well-being. Thus Greg talks about the common male approach to relationships. Women have far more ability to talk about relationships; listen to the women at the next table at the local café! We men need to keep up to speed with the women in our lives. And I am pleased to see so many young men being a 'hands-on Dad', playing with their kids, changing nappies, the full bit. Their kids will love them for it.

Despite the improvements, there are some new bad developments among younger males. We learn recently that teenagers are spending hours of their lives texting. We have a whole new range of ills: text addict is one term being used.

Again, Greg writes about body image as a major new problem among males as well as females. I like the men's health and fitness magazines, but do they have to give us such a load of stuff? Most adolescent girls do not look like skinny waifs, thank God. Likewise, most adolescent boys are lean, sometimes lumpy. Often they have pimples; sometimes they are podgy. They don't need to see the popular magazines full of lean, mean pumped-up boys like Taylor Lautner. Or the amazing, atypical bodies of Sonny Bill Williams and Cristiano Ronaldo. Too often this makes them feel they need pecs of iron, abs of steel, and the legs of death. Kids need to feel happy with themselves, and need reassurance and patience from loved ones and teachers. I was glad to see that Federal Health Minister Ms Nicola Roxon has started a new program to address this issue.

There are a couple of things the book needs. One is an index. Some of the suggestions for further reading could be revamped, for example on aging. The thinking on aging changes rapidly, and almost anything becomes dated. When is midlife these days: at 42 years, or 57? Some snazzy pictures might be an improvement. All of these could easily be added in the next edition. I am sure we will see one.

Let me stress how easy this book is to read. People want to read about their health in clear language that does not daunt them. There is a recommendation from Dr Mike Lowy and other men's health experts. This book should be in every doctor's waiting room and library. Teachers, men's health workers and other professionals will find it indispensable. Men's health is something everyone should work to improve.

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GREG MILLAN, *Men's health & wellbeing: an a-z guide*.
is available in bookstores July 1 or order online [here](#)