ATTENTION MEN:  
Doctor Knows Best

Men who think they’re too “macho” to seek medical help could end up making more trips to the doctor’s office in the long run.

“A man who waits to see a physician until his problem has become more severe might need medical attention for a longer period of time,” says Jeffrey Steinbauer, M.D., director of Baylor College of Medicine’s Family Medicine Clinic in Houston.

Left untreated, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes can lead to complications that require hospitalization or repeated visits to a physician to monitor the health problem closely. Such chronic problems usually are detected early in men who see their physicians for regular checkups or minor illnesses.

But a lot of men still seem reluctant to go to the doctor.

James Bray, Ph.D., a psychologist in Baylor’s department of family and community medicine, attributes the absence of men in doctors’ office to social conditioning.

“Men used to be taught to tough things out and not seek help unless they’re hurt really badly,” Dr. Bray says. “Fortunately, this has been changing as we learn more about health risks and family histories, but there still are plenty of men out there who were raised under the old school of thought.”

Another reason healthy young men may not see a doctor regularly is that few preventive exams or services are available for them. (Women, however, see their doctor regularly for pap tests and gynecological exams.)

Spouses can discuss the benefits of routine physical exams and early detection of health problems, and encourage men to see a physician when they’re sick.

Men aren’t the only ones who will benefit, Dr. Bray says. “Boys can learn a lot from the example set by their fathers.”

How to get your man to see the doctor

If you want your husband to visit the doctor, send him a postcard. Many doctors do this, but their cards often get tossed aside. To make yours stand out, paste photos of people he cares about on one side to remind him why he needs to take good care of himself. On the other side, let him know he’s due for an appointment.

If your husband seeks medical care for an illness, his doctor can take that opportunity to review any preventive screening available for him.