

<http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare>

Something old, new, borrowed and blue

Since the Victorian era, brides have been encouraged by custom to wear something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. However the colour blue has more recently become associated with men's health.

Since 2009, September has been designated in Australia as the blue month, specifically to increase awareness about cancers that affect men – and not just prostate and testicular cancer, but also lung, bowel, liver and other cancers.

The Blue September campaign also aims to raise funds for the Australian Cancer Research Foundation and Bowel Cancer Australia – charities dedicated to helping men (and women) reduce the risk of developing and dying from cancer by making better lifestyle choices and seeking support, advice and information sooner rather than later.

The concept of Blue September was developed in New Zealand in 2008 and was expanded to Australia the following year. Now, during September, iconic buildings worldwide are being highlighted in blue to mark the event. And, over the next few weeks, you're bound to see quite a few individual celebrities with blue face paint; and maybe some of them might have more than just the flesh on their face painted blue.

According to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) statistics, more than 22,000 Australian men die of cancer every year, (cancer is still nation's biggest killer, with the risk of being diagnosed with cancer before the age of 75 being 1 in 3 for men and 1 in 4 for women). Common types of cancers causing death in men are lung, prostate, bowel, melanoma and testicular cancer.

Of course, cancer is not a medical condition confined to men; but men are notoriously reluctant to seek medical attention early, even though we know that many cancers can be cured with early detection and appropriate treatment. And many cancers can be prevented by sensible decisions about lifestyle.

Excluding skin cancers (so-called basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma), the most common cancer in men is prostate cancer, but lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in men. It should come as no surprise therefore that if you're a smoker, the best advice is to quit. And if you're already a non smoker, then do what you can to help a mate to quit. You'll be doing yourself a favour too; because second-hand smoke – what's known as passive smoking – is also a risk factor.

The next most common cause of cancer deaths, after lung cancer, is bowel cancer. Age and health history can affect the risk of developing bowel cancer. Those of us over 50 and/or with a family history of bowel cancer are at greater risk.

Meanwhile, a recent report from the American Institute for Cancer Research has confirmed that a high intake of red and processed meats increases the risk of bowel cancer. The report recommends people restrict their weekly meat intake to 500 grams and avoid processed meats. The report also confirmed that bowel cancer risk could be reduced by avoiding excess body fat (especially around the waist), limiting alcohol consumption, and staying physically active.

All men over the age of 50 should have regular medical checks and screen for bowel cancer using a Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) at least every two years. The FOBT kits are available from most community pharmacies or from Bowel Cancer Australia.

And, community pharmacies around Australia which provide the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information have a series of "fact cards" on men's health; as well as some specific and relevant topics: *Staying a Non Smoker, Weight and Health, Fibre and Bowel Health and Fat and Cholesterol.*

Phone the Pharmaceutical Society on 1300 389 722 or log onto the website www.psa.org.au to find the nearest location; and get advice that's neither old nor borrowed but definitely up to date and evidence based.