

**J**EREMY CLARKSON'S 'pregnant man' gut, spotted recently as he filmed in Barbados, might have made the headlines, but the fact is he's hardly unique — indeed, many female readers will have their very own 'pregnant man' at home. And whether it's a look they find attractive, the worry is that a fat gut is potentially a ticking health timebomb.

Fat around the middle is particularly harmful to health, raising the risk of chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease — a major study from the U.S. recently found having a fat tummy was more deadly than being obese all over.

Women are not immune to health problems, but the statistics for men are particularly shocking — 42 per cent of men die before the age of 75, compared with 26 per cent of women, according to the Royal College of GPs.

Men are also 60 per cent more likely to develop cancers that affect both sexes, and 70 per cent more likely to die from them.

There is much a man can do to protect his health through diet, exercise and stress-reduction. But men are notoriously impervious to

## By LOUISE ATKINSON

health advice (for instance, men use GP services 20 per cent less than women, while pharmacy services see an even bigger gender discrepancy).

Chances are the new £3.5million advertising campaign by Public Health England to promote good health in the over 40s will fall largely on deaf ears. But with this stealthy way to improve his health, he might not even notice you doing it...

### SWITCH TO MALTED MILK BISCUITS

EXCESS sugar leads to weight gain, obesity and type 2 diabetes. It is also now being directly blamed for high blood pressure.

Even one sweetened soft drink is enough to raise blood pressure in otherwise healthy people, according to the journal *Metabolism*.

Other studies have suggested high sugar levels affect a key area of the brain (the hypothalamus) and cause the heart rate to quicken and blood pressure to rise. Another way sugar might affect

blood pressure is its effect on insulin levels; raising these may in turn speed the heart rate and contribute to inflammation and damage to delicate arteries.

The worry is that high blood pressure is a major factor in strokes — and stroke kills more men per year than prostate and testicular cancer combined.

So how can you cut back on his sugar intake? If you bake at home, use slightly less sugar, a smaller spoon for sugar in tea or coffee, and mix 'no sugar added' cereal 50:50 if the household has a high-sugar favourite.

Dietitian Sian Porter suggests swapping syrup or honey on yoghurt or porridge for berries (fresh or frozen), and switching biscuits for oatcakes (having weaned him via malted milk biscuits, which have 1.7g of sugar per biscuit, compared with 3.6g in a custard cream or 5g in a chocolate digestive).

Stealth sugar-reduction works — a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that after two months on a lower-sugar diet, participants perceived sugary foods to be 40 per cent sweeter than before.

### BUY HIM SOME LYCRA TRAINING GEAR

COUPLES who exercise together massively increase their chances of getting — and staying — fit. A recent study of 3,500 British couples working to reduce their risk of heart disease found the men who benefited the most had regularly active partners.

An older study found married couples who embarked on any exercise campaign together ended up with much higher attendance and lower drop-out rate than married people who participated alone (6 per cent of exercising couples dropped out, compared with 43 per cent of couples who exercised alone).

It sounds simplistic, but getting a man back into sport might be easier if you buy him a new bit of kit. 'Men are competitive by nature and he'll not take part in a sport if his kit isn't as good as — or better than — everyone else's,' argues Dr Michael Sinclair of City Psychology Group. So that could mean anything from high-tech waterproof gear to 'essentials' such as noise-cancelling headphones.

### PICK AN ARGUMENT — OR READ OUT LOUD

STUDIES show people who keep their brains active reduce their risk of suffering dementia.

When pathologists dissect the brains of people who stayed mentally active into old age (with no signs of dementia), they have still found the plaques that typically signify Alzheimer's. In other words, mental activity seemed somehow to over-ride the dementia process.

Brain-training specialists, Terry Horne and Simon Wootton (trained chemists and co-authors of *Build Your Brain Power*) worked with eminent neuroscientist, Baroness Susan Greenfield on the theory that forcing your brain to work harder increases your cognitive capacity and helps boost your memory potential.

Simon Wootton says one of the best ways of doing it is through 'meaningful conversation' (aka argument).

Brain scans show that screen-based activities, such as watching videos or TV, do not involve many areas of your brain, whereas activities that involve thinking aloud, especially with another person, cause many different parts of your brain to interact, thereby increasing your cognitive capacity.

As he told *Good Health*: 'A heated discussion is a brilliant brain training activity because it combines old and new information ('you always...you never'), but mixes it up in an analytical way.' Alternatively, he suggests reading out loud to each other.

'Reading helps protect against dementia because it forces your brain to map, connect and cross-check information and then integrate it with information already in your memory,' he says. 'Reading out loud magnifies this brain benefit and discussing what you are reading spreads the neural load wider still.'

### UNRAVEL HIS HEALTH ANCESTRY

IF YOUR partner is over 45 he'll have two big unavoidable risk factors for heart disease — gender and age — but he might not be aware of another major contributor: family history.

Do a bit of digging if you don't already know if his father or brother had a heart attack before the age of

55 or his mother or sister had one before the age of 65.

If his parents, grandparents, or other relatives had or have heart disease, diabetes or stroke, his risk will be much greater. Genetic testing may still be in its infancy, but a good family history can be a poor man's gene test, and pointing this out to him might be the impetus he needs.

### BUT DON'T MENTION THE 'DIET' WORD

ALTHOUGH 65 per cent of men in England are obese, compared with 58 per cent of women, it is less likely to be the men who worry about being overweight or get involved with weight-loss services.

'The problem is that terms such as 'diet' are not considered manly,' says Jane Ogden, a professor of health psychology at the University of Surrey.

She recommends that rather than talking about 'counting calories' or 'being on a diet', talk around the subject in terms of 'looking after yourself'.

### GET HIM A BLOOD PRESSURE KIT

BLOOD pressure tends to rise with age, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke, with men more at risk than women from both.

Research shows that regular home checks can help blood pressure control. In a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers took 450 people with high blood pressure and gave half home kits and asked them to record their levels daily for a year.

They found 72 per cent of those given home kits brought their blood pressure under control compared with 57 per cent of the control group.

The charity Blood Pressure UK recommends a machine that monitors blood pressure in the upper arm (not wrist or finger as results tend to be inconsistent), and one that's been 'clinically validated' by the British Hypertension Society (see [bhsoc.org](http://bhsoc.org) for a list). Available from chemists.

### BOOK SHORTER HOLIDAYS

YOU'D think a holiday would be a great way to help your partner de-stress. But studies have found a two-week 'break' can compound stress levels — because preparing for a long holiday then trying to catch up with your life when you get back can be stressful.

When Dutch researchers analysed seven studies on the effects of holidays on wellbeing they found that within two weeks of a break, people felt as tired as before they left. And the holiday length made no difference to the length of the afterglow.

Instead Simon Wootton recommends one long weekend break every six to eight weeks, and evenly spaced one-week holidays throughout the year.

It's backed up by a study last year at the University of Pittsburgh which found men aged 35 to 57 at high risk of heart disease, and who took five breaks a year, were 40 per cent less likely to die of coronary heart disease than those who took none.

### MEASURE YOUR DINNER PLATES

RESEARCH shows we eat whatever is on our plate and, without thinking, can easily consume 30 per cent more calories when given larger portions.

'If your dinner plates are 12in (30cm) across and bowls are 8in (20cm) wide and you fill them up, your portion sizes are probably too large,' says Sian Porter.

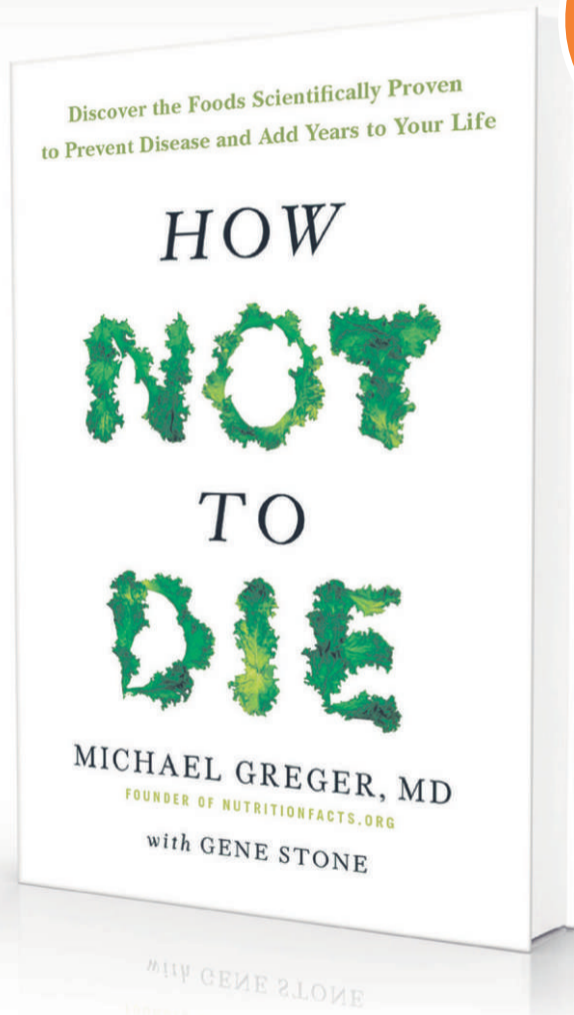
The same applies to wine glasses. Keep the 8fz (250ml) wine glasses for entertaining, and bring the small 4fz (125ml) glasses back when it's just you and him. You'll cut his alcohol intake and halve the calorie input (a small glass holds 106 calories, a typical large one is more like 252 calories).

By doing this, if you have one glass of wine a night, you'll cut more than 1,000 calories and ten units per week (or 15lb/6.9kg of fat a year).

### SPIKE HIS FOOD WITH OMEGA-3S

OMEGA-3 fats have anti-inflammatory properties and have been shown to lower type 2 diabetes risk by 33 per cent (according to a study published in *Diabetes Care* in 2013). Good food

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# HEALTH

From swapping his favourite biccies to having more sex...

# Ways to boost your husband's health without him even noticing!

sources are oily fish or walnuts, but if your partner isn't a fan, and can't be relied upon to take a supplement, sneak a fish oil supplement into his food every day — open the capsule and mix with butter or peanut butter, blend it into a smoothie, or mix with pasta sauce.

## SWAP MASHED SPUDS FOR BUTTER BEANS

VEGETARIANS tend to have healthier hearts than meat-eaters — being vegetarian could reduce risk of

heart disease by 19 per cent. Other benefits include lower cholesterol levels and lower risk of bowel cancer, which strikes 23,000 men in the UK each year.

But there's a definite gender bias within vegetarianism — an estimated 59 per cent of veggies are women. For confirmed carnivores, you might struggle to get further than 'meat-free Mondays'.

However, you can massively increase vegetable intake by adding fruit and vegetables to every meal.

Take a tip from parenting guides

for veg-refusenik toddlers — grate courgette, carrots, cauliflower or broccoli into sauces, casseroles, salads and even sandwiches.

Try mashing a tin of black beans into meatballs or burgers and serve buttery mashed butter beans, parsnips or celeriac instead of potatoes (they aren't one of his five-a-day).

Make cauliflower 'rice' (grate or blend raw) and courgette spaghetti.

You could scatter berries over an almond pie filling, and blend frozen raspberries into a nutrient-rich coulis to pour over ice cream —



Trouble ahead? Clarkson's beer belly may be bad for his health

and remember that even tinned peaches count.

## SAVE HAM FOR AN OCCASIONAL TREAT

A STUDY in 2014 by the highly-regarded Karolinska Institutet in Sweden found men who ate the most processed red meat (75g — the equivalent of two slices of ham or one sausage or more a day) were 28 pc more likely to develop heart failure, compared with men who ate the least (25g or less a day).

Researchers calculated that for each 50g daily increase in consumption of processed meat (just one or two extra slices of ham) the risk of death from heart failure increased by 38 pc.

It's the smoking, curing, salting and preservatives that are problematic, so swap ham, bacon, sausages and salami for sliced chicken, tuna and cheese (with salad, naturally).

## BUY BROWN-ISH BREAD AND PASTA

CARBS that release energy slowly — brown rice, pasta and bread — will slow the insulin response that puts your partner at risk of type 2 diabetes; these wholegrains will also boost his fibre intake that will protect him from bowel cancer. If

your household insists on everything white, try going part wholegrain with the 50/50 options available in bread, bagels, wraps, pasta, noodles and crackers. The shift to full wholegrain will be a small step away.

## KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN IN BED

MONITOR any drop-off in performance, suggests Dr David Edwards, an Oxfordshire-based GP and specialist in sexual health.

'Erection issues can be an early warning sign of vascular disease or dropping testosterone levels,' he says. In a recent study he presented to the Society for Endocrinology, Dr Edwards found men experienced symptoms — low sex drive and erectile dysfunction — for up to two years before seeking advice.

'The main reason stated was a belief that theirs was not a serious problem, and just something that was part of life — embarrassment loomed large, too.'

Dr Edwards says the only way to get your partner to a GP in this case may be to make the appointment for him. 'Our study showed the man's partner is often an important influencer of treatment seeking,' he says.

## AND YES, HAVE MORE SEX

STUDIES show that men who have sex at least twice a week are 45 per cent less likely to develop life-threatening heart disease than those who get lucky once a month or less (according to a 2010 study conducted by the New England Research Institute in Massachusetts).

Doing your bit could also help protect him against prostate cancer, according to a long-term study published by the Chan School Of Public Health in Boston.

Researchers found that frequent sexual activity (five times a week) can reduce a man's risk of prostate cancer by up to 20 pc.

## Cruel to be kind: the underwear mind-trick

■ **POSITION** a full-length mirror where he gets dressed and undressed every day. A man can only suck in his belly for only so long before he has to breathe (or diet).

■ **FIND** an unflattering picture of the two of you on a recent holiday and stick it on

the fridge door next to a romantic (considerably slimmer) picture from when you first met — it works well as an appetite suppressant.

■ **BE** absent-minded when you shop: 'forget' to stock up on biscuits, cakes, sausage rolls and crisps, but ensure

there are healthy snacks (fruit, hummus and crudites, yogurt) at eye-level in the fridge.

■ **RE-STOCK** his underwear drawer with one size smaller shorts — remove the labels. The discomfort may lead to him trying to cut down.

