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A dad's guide to staying healthy after 50

Men's Health week puts focus on practices often ignored

By **Scott Scanlon** | News Refresh Editor

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Dr. Richard Vienne and Doug Dimitroff are Buffalo-area business executives who have busy professional lives.

Both men live in Clarence.

Vienne, 52, is vice president and chief medical officer at Univera Healthcare, and a primary care doctor with Lifetime Health Medical Group.

Dimitroff, a year older, is a partner with the Phillips Lytle law firm who specializes in corporate law. His job includes frequent trips across the U.S., Europe and Asia.

Despite their high-powered jobs, the two have found themselves in recent years in the same place as men in many walks of life who pushed their health into the background as they blazed careers, started families and spent weekends in the company of friends, Buffalo food and adult beverages.

Now in their early 50s, they have adult children about to start families of their own. Talk of living long enough to enjoy those kids, and one day grandkids, has become a growing part of friendly conversations. Such talk, and feelings, can intensify on Father's Day weekend, which by no accident is part of National Men's Health Week.

"Guys take better care of their cars than they take care of themselves," said Vienne, who with his wife, Melissa, a registered nurse, have three children, Kaitlin, 24, Alex, 21, and Andrew, 19.

A century ago, women lived a year longer than men on average. Today, they tend to live six years longer. Women also tend to visit a doctor more often and have a better handle on their health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has created a **punchlist** to keep dads well – and living longer. Vienne and Dimitroff are among those who have taken the CDC recommendations to heart.



"I want to be able to feel good and be healthy for as long as I possibly can."
Doug Dimitroff, 53, father of four

“Some of the best years of life can be this point in time,” Dimitroff said, if you take good care of yourself.

Let us count some of the ways.

Get good sleep

“When I get 6 to 6½ hours of sleep, I’m dragging,” Vienne said. “When I get 7 to 8 hours, I’m a well-oiled machine.”

Insufficient sleep is tied to chronic conditions that include obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and depression. Vienne – who has struggled with weight for years, and has gone from size 45 to 40 pants during the last six years – wears a Jawbone fitness device to track his sleep and daily exercise. He has prescribed sleep studies for patients who fall below the recommended 7 to 9 hours of nightly slumber to learn if apnea or other problems might be the cause.

Toss out tobacco

Dimitroff and Vienne have never smoked. “It’s never too late to quit,” said Vienne, who also advises patients to avoid e-cigarettes because the potential risks remain unknown. The choice to smoke tobacco raises your risk of heart disease, cancer and early death. It also exposes your family to dangerous secondhand smoke. Ask your doctor to help you quit or reach out to the New York Smokers’ Quitline at (866) 697-8487 or nysmokefree.com.

Move it or lose it

“I want to be able to feel good and be healthy for as long as I possibly can,” said Dimitroff, who along with his wife, Grace, a pediatrician, has four children who range in age from 17 to 25. Dimitroff is one of four siblings who had the blessing of growing up in a family that valued exercise and healthy eating. His father, Chet, is a role model who continues to have good health at 75.

Dimitroff works out three to four times a week, often with personal trainer Nick Bendixen at Hive Lifespan Center in East Amherst. His “total body” fitness philosophy includes weight and resistance training that focuses on his core, as well as different muscle groups on different days. He mixes in cycling – indoors and out – and gravity classes. He mostly works out in the morning – whether he is traveling or not – and puts exercise on his weekly schedule along with other appointments he intends to keep. His fitness routine falls directly in line with the CDC’s recommendation of at least 2½ hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and strength training every week. Dimitroff also likes to walk his golden doodle, Lucy.

Eat right

Diet is a key part of the health equation, too, Vienne said. Pizza or burgers are an occasional treat but shouldn’t be standard fare. Dimitroff has found that being married to a doctor is a plus. Because she’s a very healthy eater and good cook, Grace Dimitroff has long been his nutritional adviser. His diet focuses on smaller portions than those he used to have, with far less bread and pasta. Fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and healthy grains have become his staples. Wine and dark chocolate remain a part of his diet – in moderation.

Tame stress

Vienne said fathers approaching their autumn years are best to remember this: “There’s only one thing in life you have control over, and it’s you.” Life can be more manageable that way.

Proper exercise and eating are part of stress relief, he counsels patients. He also believes spirituality, meditation, volunteer work and reading can bring serenity.

As their children have grown, Vienne and Dimitroff said they also have found greater comfort in the time they spend with family. Vienne enjoys playing golf with his kids, as well as **Kan-Jam**, a backyard Frisbee game the doctor proudly pointed out was created and is manufactured in Western New York and has spread internationally.

Dimitroff and Vienne also like to have wine with a healthy dinner to wind down from a busy day.

“It’s OK to have a beer or glass of wine,” the doctor advised, “but not six.”

Have a good health plan

Most men can pop off the names of the best plumber, electrician, mechanic and barber in their community, Vienne said. The best doctor? Not always.

“The doctor should not be a distributor of health but a partner in health care,” he said. “It’s a deeper, more important relationship now. When you pick a physician, they need to be a partner in your care. They need to care about you.”

As men age, they should work with a doctor who will help them plan routine checkups, preventive tests and vaccines, and offer other practical advice. Doctors and nurse practitioners can help you keep track of your blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol levels, as well as body mass index (BMI), and help bring them into a healthy range if needed. “Vaccines can protect you, your loved ones, and your community from serious diseases like influenza (flu); shingles; pneumococcal disease; human papillomavirus (HPV) infection; and tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough) – all three of which the Tdap shot protects against,” according to the CDC.

Men also should pay attention to signs and symptoms that can signal serious problems, such as chest pain, shortness of breath, excessive thirst and problems with urination. Don’t ignore these or wait for them to go away. Check with your health professional right away.

The bottom line: You should never be too busy, too proud or too afraid to make the right choices.

“If you don’t have your health,” Vienne said, “you can’t do anything else.”