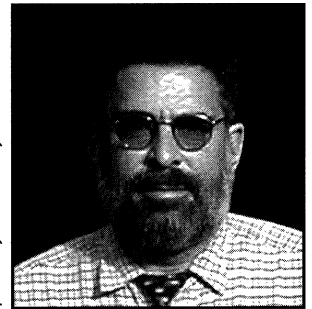


Bears & Health

Cubs, Muscle Bears, Otters, Bill Clinton and Health...

photo by Joel Bradley



If someone were doing an analysis of these Bears and Health columns, they'd probably conclude that they're mostly geared to guys like me who are middle-aged and stocky. So what about cubs, muscle bears, otters, wolves and chasers? Aren't we all just one big (no pun this time) family?

I think we are, just like all the different individuals and varieties of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are one big family, but when it comes to matters of health, the issues and problems of cubs, muscle bears, otters, wolves and chasers (those who are not also heavysset) are by and large very different from those I've mostly written about of middle-aged and stocky bears or chubs.

And as you might expect, those differences generally divide along the two big demarcators of age and weight.

Most of the problems I've written about, like sleep apnea, diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), and hyperlipdemia (high cholesterol and triglycerides) can be genetically predisposed but are primarily associated with being overweight and can be diagnosed even in young men in their twenties, though the risk increases markedly with age. By contrast, I'll give you a dollar for every under-40 muscle bear, wolf, otter or chaser who has any of these conditions.

Cubs, even heavysset or obese cubs who are under 30 are also relatively unlikely to have been diagnosed with these conditions, but they are at much higher risk than trimmer men their own age. Diabetes and high blood pressure in men under 30 is no longer the rarity it used to be.

So what are/should be the main health concerns of "cubs" (excluding those of us who are over 30, even if we

still sometimes identify as cubs).

Here's what I would say:

1) acquiring STD's from unsafe sex, especially HIV, but also the old standbys of hepatitis A, B and also C, syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, scabies, crabs, and more recently, LGV (lymphogranuloma venereum), which can result in infection of the lymph glands, especially in the groin, and penicillin-resistant staphylococcal skin infections. For bears and chubs who are sexually active, these should likewise be forefront concerns.

2) Drug abuse – especially crystal meth, which remains an out-of-control epidemic in the greater gay community, as well as those that are longer-standing and more familiar: alcohol, cocaine, pain killers, pills, hallucinogens, club and designer drugs.

3) Diabetes, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia and sleep apnea – especially if you are very overweight, even if you are a very young cub (in your early twenties). Although your risk for these conditions is lower than those of us who are heavier set and older, you are still at higher and increasing risk than your normal weight peers, and you should have your blood pressure checked at least semi-annually and your blood sugars checked at least annually, especially if there is any family history of these conditions. Anyone of any age or body configuration who is told repeatedly that he is a snorer should be evaluated for sleep apnea.

4) Being crushed by overweight daddybears like me. So when your buddies ask you how was it, you can say, politely and with a straight face (and after clearing your throat), "well, he did take my breath away."

Bears and Health Notes. Did you fol-

low the whole thing with Bill Clinton, his cholesterol medication and cardiac bypass? I think everybody missed the real Bill Clinton story: that he's one of us – a bear/chaser/chasee. In any event, Wild Bill is stocky (at least he was pre-op) and although he was a jogger, he was known for eating junk food. After some time on his doctor-prescribed cholesterol-lowering medication (one of those in the cholestatin family), he decided to stop taking it, which may have played a role in the rapid progression of his ASCVD (arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease). Bottom line. Yes, the statin drugs can have side effects, most commonly some degree of liver irritation that can result in a hepatitis-like syndrome. That's what happened to me. I was on Lipitor and when I developed those symptoms, primarily a kind of nausea mixed with loss of appetite, I quit taking the medication on my own. But in the face of what happened to Wild Bill and strong directives by doctors not to quit but rather to switch to a different statin until you find one or a combination of them that with minimal or no side effects, I'm back on board, currently with Zocor. So if you have a high or even high-normal cholesterol, please note that the recommendation by doctors is stronger than ever to take medications to lower these numbers. Take it from me and Wild Bill: A bird in hand is worth two in the bush (cough).

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