

Health Watch

Checking-In on Officer Physical Wellness with Your Doctor

Being healthy both physically and mentally allows you to be better prepared to handle the duties and responsibilities that come with being a law enforcement officer. This resource provides recommended questions to discuss with your physician to ensure that you are healthy and prepared for your duties both on-shift and at home.

Why Go to the Doctor?

A day on the job of a police officer is far from ordinary, and it is never routine. The days are long, often including irregular shift times, and work often involves high-risk, high-stress situations. Due to the nature of the policing profession, it is important for you to have an annual visit with a physician to ensure that you are physically prepared for the job and can conduct your duties in a safe manner. These exams provide an opportunity to have an open and proactive dialogue about your health with your health care provider.

Physicians may not know the unique challenges that officers frequently face. In addition, you may be unaware of how the day-to-day aspects of your job impact your health. Share the unique challenges associated with the job with your physician, such as carrying the additional weight of your protective vest and prolonged sitting in a patrol car, so you can identify ways they may impact you and your ability to remain safe.

The current global life expectancy is 72 years,¹ but according to recent estimates from some health care practitioners, life expectancy among officers is approximately 20 years less than the average life expectancy.² This shortened life expectancy may be associated with stress, lack of physical fitness, poor diet, irregular shift work throughout a career, and the potential difficulty of transitioning from work to

personal life after retirement.³ Taking proactive steps now to support your health can help extend your life and improve the overall quality of your life long into retirement.

Healthy Heart

Sudden cardiac events are one of the leading causes of line of duty deaths.⁴ Is your heart prepared for your next shift?

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- Based on my current age, health, and family history, please explain my risk for heart disease and stroke. What can I do to lower my risks?
- Can you explain what blood pressure levels mean and how my blood pressure fits into that scale?
- Is my blood pressure at a healthy level? How often should I have my blood pressure checked?
- What does my cholesterol number mean, and is it at a healthy level? What can I do to lower my cholesterol and/or keep it low?
- How often should I have my cholesterol levels checked?

1 https://www.who.int/gho/mortality_burden_disease/life_tables/situation_trends_text/en/

2 Violanti, John & Fekedulegn, Desta & Hartley, Tara & Andrew, Michael & Gu, Ja & Burchfiel, Cecil. (2013). Life Expectancy in Police Officers: A Comparison with the U.S. General Population. *International journal of emergency mental health*. 15. 217-28. 10.1037/e577572014-031.

3 Violanti, John & Fekedulegn, Desta & Hartley, Tara & Andrew, Michael & Gu, Ja & Burchfiel, Cecil. (2013). Life Expectancy in Police Officers: A Comparison with the U.S. General Population. *International journal of emergency mental health*. 15. 217-28. 10.1037/e577572014-031.

4 Officer Down Memorial Page: 2019 Line of Duty Death Report. <https://www.odmp.org/statistics>.

Blood Pressure Categories

Blood Pressure Category	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120-129	and	Less than 80
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	130-139	or	80-89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	140 or Higher	or	90 or Higher
Hypertension Crisis (consult your doctor immediately)	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120



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HEALTH TIP #1

It is important to be proactive and take control of your health at any age. Even if you are not experiencing symptoms that require a doctor's visit, schedule your annual wellness exam to identify conditions you may not be aware of in order to catch potential health issues early.



HEALTH TIP #2

Your mental wellness is just as important as your physical wellness, and they can even impact one another. Speak with your doctor about stress you may be experiencing so you can discuss how it may be affecting your physical health.

Job-Related Considerations

The following have been identified as health considerations for officers due to the nature of the profession. Address the following with your doctor:

My job requires that I wear heavy equipment on my belt and a bullet-resistant vest.



1. What are some strategies for strengthening my upper/lower body muscles to better support the equipment weight?
2. Do you have recommendations on how I can improve my posture on and off the job?

My sleep schedule is often irregular because of my shift hours.



1. What steps can I take to balance a healthy sleep schedule with the demands of my shift work?
2. How can I set up an environment at home for quality sleep?
3. I often snore while I am sleeping. What might be the cause of this, and how can it be treated?
4. What are some ways to lessen the effects of night shift work?
5. I rely on coffee or energy drinks when I feel tired at work. How can I safely cut back? What are some alternatives to caffeine?

I am often idle in my vehicle for extended periods of time.



1. How might extended periods of inactivity impact my health? How can I work to counteract or overcome those effects?
2. I frequently find myself buying unhealthy fast-food meals because they are quick and easy when I am in a patrol car all day. What are some ways I could improve my nutritional wellness? What are some healthy snacks I can eat to keep myself feeling full?
3. Can you refer me to someone who is knowledgeable about fitness techniques useful to police?
4. When off-duty, I do not have the energy to work out. What are some healthy ways to get enough energy to stay active?

Family medical history considerations.



1. Does anything about my family's medical history point to potential health issues?
2. How does my family's medical history affect my health?
3. What effects can on-the-job stress have on my overall health? What are some recommended stress management exercises?

HEALTH TIP #3



As a police professional, you are at an increased risk of the following serious medical conditions. You may want to learn more about these:⁵

- Heart Disease
- Respiratory Issues
- Cirrhosis
- Joint and back issues
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Mental health issues

5 John M. Violanti, Ph.D. (2014). *Dying for the Job: Police Work Exposure and Health*.

General Health Questions

The following is a list of general questions to ask your physician during a physical:

Weight

1. What is a healthy, realistic weight for me?
2. What are some foods I could change or add to my diet to meet my health goals?
3. What physical activity can I work into my lifestyle?



Age

1. What medical tests should I have at my age? What medical tests should I have in the near future?
2. Based on my age and overall health, what types of physical activity are appropriate for me?
3. How much daily physical activity is recommended for someone my age?
4. Are there certain activities I should avoid?



HEALTH TIP #4

As you age, you should consider having a conversation with your doctor about the following tests:



An exercise treadmill test to examine heart health.



Coronary calcium scan to test for plaque buildup which narrows and hardens the arteries impeding blood flow, also known as Coronary Artery Disease.



Advanced lipid panel test to examine cholesterol levels.

Taking proactive steps to support your health and wellbeing can positively impact job performance, increase safety, and help you work towards a long career and healthy retirement.

This publication is one in a series. For more family support resources please visit: www.theIACP.org/OSW



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