



When you read up about your physical condition, you take an important tool into your own hands. The more you know about your physical condition, and the more positive steps you take, the better your chance for positive outcomes and treatment success.

Health Topic: Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common internal cancer of males in the United States. Prostate cancer is very uncommon before the age of 50 but increases steeply with increasing age after 60. Approximately 1 in 6 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. Many recent advances have allowed earlier diagnosis. Improvements in treatment options have resulted in the vast majority of patients being cured and fewer experiencing complications (i.e. preservation of potency and urinary control).

The exact cause of Prostate Cancer is not known but associated risk factors suggest that genetic, racial, and dietary habits play a significant role. Patients with a family history (grand-father, father, brother or uncle) of prostate cancer face a 2 to 10 times increased risk of developing prostate cancer. African-Americans have the highest rate of all Americans. An increased diet of red meat increases your risk, whereas eating tomatoes, cruciferous vegetables, and taking vitamins D & E lower your risk.

Prostate cancer usually causes no symptoms until it is very advanced when patients may experience urinary blockage or bone pain. It is therefore important that a male begin to get regular examinations to include a DRE (digital rectal exam) and blood tests of PSA (prostate-specific antigen) after turning 50 years old.

The diagnosis of prostate cancer requires a biopsy. With modern techniques this can often be done as a painless out-patient office procedure. Usually, an ultra-sound of the prostate is done simultaneously with the biopsy. This is done by inserting a small probe about the size of finger into the rectum. Through a channel in the probe, needles are passed, first to numb the area and then to take the specimens.

The extent of prostate cancer is determined by several factors including total PSA, size of the cancer found by exam and biopsies, and aggressiveness of the cancer found on the pathology of the prostate biopsy samples. Some patients may need further evaluation with radiological studies (i.e. Bone scan, CAT scan, or MRI scan).

Many treatments are available and depending on the extent and aggressiveness of the cancer may or may not be options. These decisions need to be made in consultation with your doctor to fully

understand all of the risks and benefits.

The main treatment options are:

1. **Watchful Waiting:** This involves regular check-ups and waiting to see if the cancer will progress. Usually recommended for elderly men with shorter life expectancies and early stage cancer.
2. **Hormonal Therapy:** This involves methods of lowering the male hormone to slow down the growth and progression of the cancer by use of injections, pills and/or surgery. Usually recommended for advanced cases of prostate cancer, but may be used in combination with other treatments.
3. **Surgical Therapy:** This involves the complete removal of the prostate and seminal vesicles and may include removal of pelvic lymph nodes. The most common approaches, used in surgery, are either the traditional open (incision in the lower abdomen) or the [Robotic](#) (a minimally invasive laparoscopic technique using a few small incisions). Usually recommended for men under 72 with early-stage, organ confined cancer but is also used for very aggressive locally advanced cancer. Surgery is currently the most widely used treatment for prostate cancer in the US.
4. **Radiation Therapy:** This involves the use of high-energy x-rays, either by Brachytherapy (implantation small radioactive grain-of-rice size pellets or seeds) or beams emitted from a machine such as IMRT (intensity modulated radiation therapy) or combinations of both. Usually recommended for men with organ confined disease or those whose cancers have spread too widely in the pelvis for surgical removal. Radiation is also used to treat recurrence after prostate surgery and to shrink prostate cancer spread and relieve the pain associated with spread.

Suggested Reading for More Information

