



THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PROSTATE GLAND

Denying the problem, as so many of us do, can seriously interfere with our enjoyment of life

In some cases, ignorance can be bliss, but when it comes to your health, knowledge is often the key to staying well. Thanks to the medical community, the once hush-hush discussion about the prostate is out of the closet. And justifiably so since prostate cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer among men 50 and older. About 80 percent of all cases of prostate cancer are experienced by men over 65.

The good news is that while men 75 and over have a 50 percent chance of developing cancer in the prostate, the vast majority of these cancers will never become what doctors call "clinically manifest cancer"—cancer that has the possibility of becoming life-threatening.

And with early detection, the cure rate is 85 percent.

Not all prostate problems lead to cancer. Even though by the age of 60, 4 out of 5 men will suffer the effects of an enlarged prostate, a condition called benign prostate hypertrophy (BPH), it is not linked to cancer and rarely impairs sexual functioning.

Dr. William J. Catalona, professor and chief of Urologic Surgery at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and a nationally recognized speaker and author on the subject of the prostate gland, explains: "The prostate is approximately the size of a small egg. Common micro focal cancers (non life-threatening) are like a grain of salt within that egg; however, clinically manifest cancers are the size of the egg yolk."

For men over 70, the chance of getting aggressive or non-aggressive prostate cancer increases greatly and does not progress more slowly as commonly believed. While the warning signs for BPH are quite evident—frequent urination, difficulty in starting urination and a feeling that urination is not complete—prostate cancer is notorious for growing silently and keeping its victims unaware of its presence until it has spread outside the prostate into surrounding tissue and bone.

That's why early detection is so important in reducing the risk of cancer, which may develop into a life-threatening disease. The American Cancer Society recommends that men over the age of 50 have an annual blood test and digital rectal exam; if they have a genetic predisposition to the disease,

annual tests should begin at 40.

Dr. Catalona also urges men over 50 to take a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test, which detects an enzyme that only seeps out of the prostate and into the blood stream when a tumor is present. He is pleased with recent studies that reveal a high success rate for the PSA procedure, finding cancers not yet detected in rectal exams.

Besides establishing your health with regular examinations here are a few other suggestions for preventing prostate problems: 1) lower the fat and cholesterol content in your diet; 2) limit the consumption of alcohol, coffee and spicy foods; 3) eat less meat and more vegetables; 4) sit in a warm bath for 20 minutes at least once a week to increase blood flow and reduce swelling; and 5) get plenty of exercise; movement helps promote circulation and reduces pressure on the prostate.

—Martin Brown

HEALTH RESOURCES

INFORMATION:

HelpBook: What to Do If Cancer Strikes offers a useful step-by-step approach to the subject.

Published by the Cancer Research Institute, the 45-page publication also includes an extensive list of many national and local organizations that provide assistance and information to cancer patients. To get a copy, call 800-99-CANCER.

HOTLINES:

Cancer Information Service
800-4-CANCER

Y-Me
800-221-2141

American Cancer Society
800-ACS-2345