



Prostate Cancer

PREVENTIONS:

Ways To Reduce Your Risk

By Andrew Siegel MD

One in nine men in the U.S. will develop prostate cancer, the most common male malignancy (aside from skin cancer). It would be wonderful if the disease was preventable and would certainly make my job as a urologist much easier. Unfortunately, we are not there yet, but have become wiser and more enlightened about measures to diminish the chances of developing prostate cancer.

The main risk factors for the disease are aging, genetics, race and lifestyle. The first three factors are beyond one's control, but lifestyle is a modifiable risk factor. A healthy lifestyle, including a wholesome and nutritious diet, weight management, regular exercise and the avoidance of tobacco and excessive alcohol, can lessen one's risk for all chronic diseases - heart disease, diabetes and a host of cancers, including prostate cancer. It can also slow the growth and progression of prostate cancer in those afflicted.

Consider the fact that when Asian men - who have very low rates of prostate cancer - emigrate to western countries, their risk of prostate cancer increases over time. Clearly, a calorie-rich, nutrient-poor, Western diet is associated with a higher occurrence of many preventable problems, including prostate cancer.

Not uncommonly, pre-cancerous biopsies predate the onset of prostate cancer by many years. This, coupled with the increasing prevalence of prostate cancer with aging, suggests that the process of developing prostate cancer takes place over a prolonged period of time. It is estimated to take many years - often more than a decade - from the initial prostate cell mutation to the time when prostate cancer manifests itself with either a PSA (prostate specific antigen blood test) abnormality or an abnormal digital rectal examination. In theory, this provides the opportunity for preventive measures and intervention before the establishment of a cancer.

Six Ways to Reduce Risk for Prostate Cancer

1. Maintain a healthy weight. Obesity is correlated with an increased risk for prostate cancer occurrence, recurrence, progression and death. Research suggests a link between a high-fat diet and prostate cancer. In men with prostate cancer, the odds of spread and death are increased 1.3-fold in men with a body mass index (BMI) of 30-35 and 1.5-fold in men with a BMI greater than 35. Furthermore, carrying the burden of extra weight increases the complication rate following prostate cancer treatments.

2. Eat real food and avoid refined, over-processed, nutritionally-empty foods; be moderate with animal fats and dairy consumption. A healthy diet includes whole grains and plenty of colorful vegetables and fruits. Vegetables and fruits are rich in anti-oxidants, vitamins, minerals and fiber. Anti-oxidants help protect cells from injury caused by free radicals, which can incur cellular

damage and potentially cause cancer. Fruits, such as berries, red cabbage and eggplant contain abundant anthocyanins, anti-oxidant pigments that give red, blue and purple plants their vibrant coloring. Tomatoes, tomato products and other red fruits and vegetables are rich in lycopenes, which are bright red carotenoid anti-oxidant pigments. Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, kale and cabbage) and dark green leafy vegetables are fiber-rich and contain lutein, a carotenoid anti-oxidant pigment. A healthy diet includes protein sources incorporating fish rich in anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, sardines and trout), lean poultry and plant proteins (legumes, nuts and seeds). Processed and charred meats should be avoided. Healthy vegetable-origin fats (olives, avocados, seeds and nuts) are preferred. An ideal diet that adheres to these general recommendations and is heart-healthy and prostate-healthy is the Mediterranean diet.

3. Avoid tobacco and excessive alcohol intake. Tobacco use is associated with more aggressive prostate cancers and a higher risk of prostate cancer progression, recurrence and death. Prostate cancer risk rises with heavy alcohol use, so moderation is recommended.

4. Stay active and exercise on a regular basis. Exercise lessens one's risk of developing prostate cancer and decreases the death rate in those who do develop it. If stricken with prostate cancer, if one is physically fit, they will have an easier recovery from any intervention necessary to treat the disease. Exercise positively influences energy metabolism, oxidative stress and the immune system. Pelvic floor muscle exercises benefit prostate health by increasing pelvic blood flow and decreasing the tone of the part of the nervous system stimulated by

stress, which can aggravate urinary symptoms. Furthermore, pelvic floor muscle exercises strengthen the muscles surrounding the prostate so that if one develops prostate cancer and requires treatment, he will experience an expedited recovery of urinary control and sexual function.

5. Be proactive and see your doctor annually for a DRE (digital rectal exam) and a PSA (prostate specific antigen) blood test. The PSA test does not replace the DRE - both need to be done.

6. Finasteride (Proscar and Propecia) and dutasteride (Avodart), commonly used to treat benign prostate enlargement, reduce prostate cancer risk. These medications block the conversion of testosterone to its activated form that causes prostate growth and male-pattern baldness. They help prevent prostate cancer, shrink the prostate, improve urinary symptoms, help avoid prostate surgery and grow hair on one's scalp - a fountain of youth dispensed in a pill form.

Bottom line: When it comes to health, it is advantageous to be proactive instead of reactive, making every effort to prevent problems instead of having to have them fixed. The cliché "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is as relevant to prostate cancer as it is to other health issues including diabetes and heart disease.

This article is an excerpt from Andrew Siegel MD's recently published book, "Prostate Cancer 20/20: A Practical Guide to Understanding Management Options for Patients and Their Families."

