

Preventing Prostate Cancer

Doctors can not always explain why one person gets cancer and another does not. However, scientists have studied general patterns of cancer in the population to learn what things around us and what things we do in our lives may increase our chance of developing cancer.

Anything that increases a person's chance of developing a disease is called a risk factor; anything that decreases a person's chance of developing a disease is called a protective factor. Some of the risk factors for cancer can be avoided, but many can not. For example, although you can choose to quit smoking, you can not choose which genes you have inherited from your parents. Both smoking and inheriting specific genes could be considered risk factors for certain kinds of cancer, but only smoking can be avoided. Prevention means avoiding the risk factors and increasing the protective factors that can be controlled so that the chance of developing cancer decreases.

Although many risk factors can be avoided, it is important to keep in mind that avoiding risk factors does not guarantee that you will not get cancer. Also, most people with a particular risk factor for cancer do not actually get the disease. Some people are more sensitive than others to factors that can cause cancer. Talk to your doctor about methods of preventing cancer that might be effective for you.

What the prostate gland does

The prostate is a gland in males that is involved in the production of semen. It is located between the bladder and the rectum. The normal prostate gland is the size of a walnut and surrounds the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder.

Significance of prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common non-skin cancer among men in the United States. Although the number of men with this disease is large, the number of men who are expected to die of the disease is considerably smaller, since the majority of men diagnosed with prostate cancer do not die of it.

Prostate cancer prevention

Prostate cancer can sometimes be associated with known risk factors for the disease. Many risk factors are modifiable though not all can be avoided.

Age: The risk of developing prostate cancer increases as a man gets older.



Chemoprevention: Chemoprevention is the use of specific natural or man-made drugs, vitamins, or other agents to reverse, suppress, or prevent cancer growth. Several agents, including difluoromethylornithine (DFMO), isoflavonoids, selenium, vitamins D and E, and lycopene have shown potential benefit in studies. Further studies are needed to confirm this.

Diet and Lifestyle: The effect of diet on prostate cancer risk is being studied now. A diet high in fat, especially animal fat, may be associated with an increased risk of prostate cancer. More studies are needed to determine if a low-fat diet with more fruits and vegetables helps prevent prostate cancer.

Hormonal Prevention: Studies are underway to discover the role of certain drugs, such as finasteride, that reduce the amount of male hormone as preventive agents for prostate cancer.

Race: The risk of prostate cancer is dramatically higher among African Americans, intermediate among whites, and lowest among native Japanese. However, this increase in risk may be due to other factors associated with race. Studies have shown a link between levels of testosterone and prostate cancer risk, with African American men having the highest levels.

For more information on prostate cancer and screening, visit anthem.com. Also visit the following sites:

National Cancer Institute - www.cancer.gov

American Cancer Society – www.cancer.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov

National Institutes of Health – www.nih.gov

Source: National Cancer Institute U.S. National Institutes of Health, www.cancer.gov

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