

Title:

Risk Factors For Prostate Cancer

Word Count:

572

Summary:

The prostate is a small, walnut-shaped sex gland in men that produces the seminal fluid, which nourishes and transports sperm. The growth of the cells in the prostate gland is stimulated by the male sex hormone called testosterone. Though its causes are unknown, prostate cancer is a frightening prospect for men. This cancer threatens not just their lives, but also their sexuality. Possible consequences of treatment (even if the treatment has been successful in saving a person...

Keywords:

prostate cancer, prostate, prostate gland, prostate exam

Article Body:

The prostate is a small, walnut-shaped sex gland in men that produces the seminal fluid, which nourishes and transports sperm. The growth of the cells in the prostate gland is stimulated by the male sex hormone called testosterone. Though its causes are unknown, prostate cancer is a frightening prospect for men. This cancer threatens not just their lives, but also their sexuality. Possible consequences of treatment (even if the treatment has been successful in saving a person's life) include erectile dysfunction and bladder control problems. Prostate cancer progresses very slowly and the early stages show little or no symptoms. If detected early, effective treatment with minimum side effects is possible. Once the cancer spreads (metastizes) treatment becomes more difficult.

A man's vulnerability to prostate cancer increases with age. Most often, prostate cancer is detected very late and people who lose their lives do not die from prostate cancer, but die WITH prostate cancer. As the cancer develops, it eventually squeezes the urethra, which surrounds the prostate. This is when signs and symptoms begin to appear:

- Urgency in urination
- Difficulty in starting urination
- Dull, persistent ache in the lower pelvic area
- Painful urination, a very slow flow (almost like a dribble)

- Intermittent urine flow, and a sensation that the bladder is not empty
- Frequent urination, sometimes including blood
- Painful ejaculation
- Persistent pain in the bones, lower back, hip and thighs
- General ill health, loss of appetite, and decline in weight

If the cells from the cancerous prostate break away, the cancer will spread. Most commonly, prostate cancer spreads to the lymph nodes, bones in the hips or the lower back, lungs, and sometimes even the brain.

Risk factors:

The risk of prostate cancer increases with age. As with almost any other cancer, heredity also plays a key role. For reasons unknown, African-American men seem to have a higher risk of prostate cancer. A fat-rich diet and sedentary lifestyle also contributes to the risk. Fat causes an increased production of testosterone, which may in turn lead to the development of cancer cells. High levels of testosterone mean higher chances of developing prostate cancer. Therefore men who suffer from hypogonadism, or have been undergoing long-term testosterone treatments are at risk. A vasectomy may also result in prostate cancer, though there is no conclusive proof of this.

A routine screening test may reveal the beginnings of prostate cancer. A DRE (Digital Rectal Examination), which involves inserting a gloved finger into the rectum, helps the doctor to examine the prostate. Any change in shape or size of the gland may mean trouble. A prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test analyzes a blood sample for the levels of PSA. If a higher than normal level is detected, a prostate infection or cancer may be suspected. A transrectal ultrasound helps to further evaluate the prostate using sound waves. If initial tests produce positive results, a prostate biopsy may be done to verify the presence of cancer. If cancer is confirmed, the next step is to investigate the spread of the cancer. A bone scan, CT scan, and Ultrasound scan may be used for this.

The mode of treatment directly depends on how aggressive the cancer is. For most men, a combination of treatments (surgery, radiation paired with hormone therapy, chemotherapy) may prove effective.

The best way to reduce the risk from prostate cancer is to eat a diet rich in fiber and low in fat. Regular exercise also helps.