

Title:

Prostate Cancer - Are Men Their Own Worst Enemy?

Word Count:

600

Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

The commonest form of cancer in the United States today is skin cancer but, to many people's surprise, prostate cancer is the second most frequently seen type of cancer and results in some 30,000 deaths each year. So just what is prostate cancer?

The human body starts its life as a single cell which divides repeatedly to form new cells. As cell division continues so the newly created cells, acting as the building blocks of the human body, form themselves into walls of tissue creating the various parts that we recognize as the human body. This is not however the end of the process as, throughout our lives, our bodies change constantly with old cells wearing out and dying and other newer cells continuing the process of division to replace them.

Occasionally however this process of division does not follow the pattern that it should and a cell divides incorrectly, forming two cells which do not carry the correct information to function normally. At the same time this frequently sets off a chain reaction so that these cells in turn begin to divide, forming further faulty cells.

This, in simple terms, is the basis of all cancers and, where faulty cell division takes place in the prostate gland, then the result is prostate cancer.

The prostate gland, which is about the size of a walnut, sits between the bladder and the rectum and partially surrounds the urethra (the tube which carries urine from the bladder) and its main function is to produce and store a clear fluid which makes up about thirty percent of male semen.

Although we tend to think of cancer whenever the prostate is mentioned, there are in fact numerous other problems that can affect the prostate gland, many of which can be quite easily treated.

Prostate cancer is rarely seen in men under the age of 40 and, although cases are seen between the ages of 40 and 65, the vast majority of prostate cancer cases arise in men over the age of 65.

In many cases however the progress of the disease is slow and early stage prostate cancer often carries few if any noticeable symptoms. For this reason many men can suffer from prostate cancer for years before it is diagnosed and the average age at which diagnosis is made in the United States is currently 70.

If caught in its early stages prostate cancer can be successfully treated either by surgery or radiation therapy (radiotherapy) and, while such treatment can often leave its mark in terms of ongoing problems with urination or a degradation or loss of sexual function, the cancer will often not return.

Problems arise however if prostate cancer is more advanced at the time of diagnosis and has already spread into neighboring tissue and bone, or has been carried to other parts of the body, usually through the lymphatic system. Here a combination of surgery, radiation therapy and possibly hormone therapy can certainly help in treating the problem but the cancer will often reappear.

Perhaps the biggest problem lies in the fact that, in terms of their general health and sexual health in particular, men have traditionally suffered in silence and will only venture into the doctor's surgery when they are at death's door.

This fortunately is starting to change in our modern society, even if only slowly, and as an increasing number of men turn to their doctor when they first suspect that something might be wrong, rather than waiting until they know something is wrong, then perhaps the early diagnosis of prostate cancer will result in fewer deaths each year from this treatable disease.