

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death in men. However, the chances of survival can be as high as 90 percent if diagnosed and treated early.

THE prostate gland is part of the male reproductive system (see the picture below). The prostate makes a fluid that mixes with sperm and other fluids during ejaculation. A normal prostate is about the size of a walnut.

What is prostate cancer?

Cancer is when cells in the body grow out of control. Prostate cancer is a group of abnormal cells in the prostate.

Prostate cancer can be aggressive, which means it grows quickly and spreads to other parts of the body. (When cancer spreads, doctors say the cancer has "metastasized.") Or it may be slow growing and stay in the prostate, causing few if any problems. Three out of four cases of prostate cancer are of the slow-growing type that is relatively harmless.

Who's at Risk?

Men ages 50 and older are at risk for prostate cancer, and the risk increases with age. African Americans, for reasons still unknown, and men with a family history of prostate cancer are at the highest risk for developing the disease.

What are the Symptoms?

Early prostate cancer usually has no symptoms, especially in its earliest stages. So, that's why screening is so important.

- Weak or interrupted flow of urine
- Inability to urinate or difficulty in beginning to urinate
- Need to urinate frequently, especially at night,
- Blood in urine or semen, and
- Continuing pain in the lower back, pelvis or upper thighs.

How is Prostate Cancer Detected?

A digital rectal exam (DRE) performed together with the prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test is the most effective way to detect prostate cancer at an early and potentially curable stage. PSA is produced by both normal and cancerous prostate cells and is measured in a blood sample. The higher the PSA level, the greater the chance a man has prostate cancer. Suspicious PSA tests are usually followed by an ultrasound and a biopsy, to determine whether cancer is present and, if so, its level of development.

What are the Treatment Options?

If prostate cancer is detected in the early stages, treatment options are much broader, and the chances for a cure are much greater. The best predictor of whether someone has curable prostate cancer is whether the disease is completely confined within the prostate gland and if the cancer is completely eradicated with treatment. A patient's treatment options depend on the stage of the disease, age, physician's recommendations and personal decisions. Surgery or Radiation Therapy is often the first course of action for treating the disease.

Surgery

The goal of surgery is to remove the cancer. The most common prostate cancer surgery is called Radical Prostatectomy. This procedure, which involves removing the entire gland, is the most effective way to eliminate cancer that is confined to the prostate. If the cancer has advanced and spread outside the prostate, it cannot be cured with surgery alone.

Radiation therapy involves exposing cancer cells to high doses of radiation, with the goal of killing the tumor. One type of radiation therapy that is becoming more popular is Brachytherapy. With this treatment, tiny radioactive seeds are implanted into the prostate. The seeds then deliver high doses of radiation to targeted areas of the prostate with the goal of destroying the cancer.

Hormonal Therapy, a treatment used to decrease the production of testosterone, which is the primary fuel for hormone dependent prostate cancer. Ultimately, the starvation of testosterone slows cancer cell growth.

Chemotherapy, a treatment involving the use of drugs to destroy cancer cells when the tumor becomes Hormone Refractory. Choosing a treatment approach should be done in consultation with your doctor. Recently Food and Drug Administration of USA approved Taxotere, a novel chemotherapy in the treatment of Hormone Refractory

How to prevent Prostate cancer?

A high intake of tomatoes (lycopene) and Tomato sauce, broccoli, Beans and garden peas, Sun exposure, Fish oils and Fish consumption, Beta-carotene, Vitamin A, Selenium are proved to be protective against Prostate cancer in many clinical trial.

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