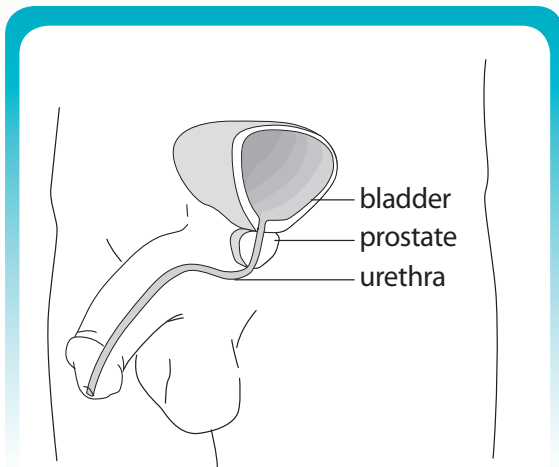




Prostate cancer prevention

Prostate cancer is common in men. There are some steps you can take to try and reduce your risk of prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. One out of eight Canadian men will develop prostate cancer during their lifetime. Prostate cancer is usually curable if diagnosed early. Even when the disease is advanced, treatment can relieve symptoms and make one live longer. This brochure will explain many facts about prostate cancer and suggest some methods for preventing it.



What is the prostate?

The prostate is a small gland about the size and shape of a chestnut. It is situated just below the bladder and surrounds the urethra, the passageway that carries urine from the bladder through the penis during urination. Women do not have a prostate. The prostate secretes fluid, which forms part of the semen in which sperm are transported.

What is cancer?

Cells in the body normally grow in an organized, controlled manner. There is a balance between new cells being produced and old cells dying. The number of cells is approximately the same because of this balance. When control of this balance is lost, new cells grow more rapidly than old cells die. These cells become abnormal and can form a tumor or growth. Some of these tumors are called benign (not cancer) because they grow slowly and do not spread elsewhere in the body. Other tumors invade and destroy normal tissue and are called malignant tumors or cancer. These tumors can spread to other parts of the body where they can grow (these are called metastases).

What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer occurs when cells within the prostate gland continue to grow uncontrollably and they may spread to other areas of the body. Prostate cancer should not be confused with benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), which is a very common noncancerous growth of the prostate and which can compress the urethra, causing urinary symptoms. Most prostate cancers do not cause any urinary symptoms. A man's prostate gland naturally grows as he ages and he may experience difficulty emptying his bladder from this process. BPH is not related to prostate cancer.

Who gets prostate cancer?

There are some things that we cannot change: for instance, the genes we inherit from our parents. Currently, we know that some prostate cancers can be inherited from a relative. Men with a first-degree relative (e.g. father, brother) are at increased risk of developing prostate cancer. Certain races and ethnic groups are also at increased risk for developing prostate cancer (e.g. men of African descent). Generally, the risk of prostate cancer is increased as a man ages (>55 years of age).

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Can I prevent prostate cancer?

While there are some things that you cannot change, as mentioned above, there are a few things you can do to reduce your risk of prostate cancer. Diet is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk. Men who are obese are more likely to develop prostate cancer. Furthermore, the majority of men with prostate cancer ultimately die of other causes—especially heart disease (e.g. heart attacks or strokes). Therefore, a healthy diet that prevents both obesity and heart disease will be beneficial in preventing prostate cancer. A diet low in fat, red meat, charred meats, processed meats (sausages, bacon and hot dogs) may reduce your risk of prostate cancer. There is some evidence that stopping smoking will help prevent the development of prostate cancer. Eating a diet high in vegetables reduces the risk of prostate cancer. Sulphur-containing vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower contain antioxidants that may prevent cancer. Omega-3 fatty acids, which are found particularly in fish oils, are thought to be protective against prostate cancer. In the same context, exercise may also be beneficial.

Do vitamins reduce my risk?

There are no vitamins or supplements that have been shown to reduce your risk of prostate cancer. Vitamin E and selenium were thought to be beneficial, but this has recently been refuted in a large study. There is some evidence that men with higher levels of vitamin D in their body are at lower risk for developing prostate cancer, but there are no studies that show that taking vitamin D supplements helps to reduce prostate cancer. A diet high in fruits and vegetables,

particularly carotenoids and cooked tomato products has been shown to help reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Lycopenes, especially, may be beneficial. Sources of lycopene include tomatoes, papaya and watermelon. Lycopenes are best absorbed into your body after cooking.

Are there any medications to help prevent prostate cancer?

Two separate studies have been performed in a large number of men (>20,000) which have demonstrated that a class of medicines called 5-alpha reductase inhibitor decreases the risk of being diagnosed with prostate cancer by 25% compared to men taking placebo (sugar pill). There are two 5-alpha reductase inhibitors currently available: finasteride or dutasteride. These medications are typically prescribed for men with symptoms from an enlarged prostate gland (BPH) in order to shrink their prostate and relieve symptoms. You can speak to your physician to see if it would be appropriate for you to take this medication to help prevent prostate cancer.

Conclusion

Although you cannot change some things like the genes you inherit from relatives, there is good evidence that avoiding obesity helps prevent prostate cancer. A healthy diet, exercise and smoking cessation are not only good for your prostate, but also good for your heart and overall health. Speak to your physician about taking a 5-alpha reductase inhibitor to determine whether or not it is for you. As always, regular check ups with your physician will also keep you on track for a healthy life.

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