

# Fact Sheet

California Department of Health Services | Cancer Detection Section

## prostate cancer

*Prostate cancer is the most common non-skin cancer in men. One man out of six will be diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point in his lifetime.*<sup>1</sup>

### What is Prostate Cancer?

- The prostate is a gland, about the size of a walnut, located under the bladder and surrounding the upper part of the urethra. The urethra is a tube that carries urine and semen through the penis to the outside of the body. The prostate gland is found only in men. It produces semen, the liquid that carries the sperm when a man ejaculates.<sup>2</sup>
- Prostate cancer starts in the cells of the prostate gland. When a man has prostate cancer, the prostate cancer cells grow into a tumor. These cancer cells can also spread into other parts of the body.<sup>2</sup>
- The most common symptom of prostate cancer is no symptom at all.<sup>2</sup>

### Risk Factors and Prevention

- While 1 man out of 6 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime, only 1 man in 34 will die of this disease. The death rate for prostate cancer is going down. And the disease is being found earlier as well.<sup>1</sup>
- Prostate cancer is a disease that is often associated with aging. About 75 percent of men are aged 65 years and older when diagnosed with prostate cancer.<sup>3</sup>
- African American men are at especially high risk for prostate cancer: They are over 50 percent more likely to develop this disease than non-Hispanic white men. African American men are twice as likely to die of this disease. Prostate cancer occurs less often in Asian men than in whites.<sup>1,3</sup>
- Men with close family members (father or brother) who have had prostate cancer are more likely to get it themselves, especially if their relatives were young when they got the disease.<sup>1</sup>
- In California, approximately 18,865 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2007, 3,010 men will die from it and 114,600 men will continue living with it.<sup>3</sup>
- Because we don't know the exact cause of prostate cancer, it is not possible to give good advice about prevention. Some experts think that diet can reduce the risk of developing prostate cancer by eating less red meat and fat, and eating more fruits, vegetables and grains.<sup>1</sup>

### Prostate Cancer Screening Options

- Prostate cancer can often be found early by testing the amount of Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) in a man's blood. PSA is a substance made by the normal prostate gland. Although PSA is mostly found in semen, a small amount is also found in the blood. There is no question that the PSA test can help spot prostate cancer. But it can't tell how dangerous the cancer is.<sup>1</sup>
- Another way to find prostate cancer is the Digital Rectal Exam (DRE). To do the DRE, the doctor inserts a gloved, lubricated finger into the rectum to feel for any irregular or firm areas that might be cancer. The DRE is less effective than the PSA blood test in finding prostate cancer, but it can

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sometimes find cancers in men with normal PSA levels. For this reason, the American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends that when prostate cancer screening is done, both the DRE and the PSA should be used.<sup>1</sup>

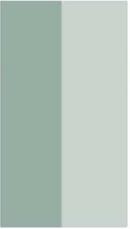
- These tests are not always accurate, however. Wrong test results could lead to excess worry, or even an unneeded biopsy or other tests. Until more is known, one should talk to his doctor about whether or not he needs to be tested. Things to take into account are age and health. If one is young and gets prostate cancer, it will probably shorten his life if it is not caught early. But if one is older or in poor health, then prostate cancer may never become a major problem because it often grows so slowly.<sup>1</sup>
- ACS believes that doctors should offer the PSA blood test and DRE yearly, beginning at age 50 to men who do not have any major medical problems and can be expected to live at least 10 more years. Men at high risk should begin testing at age 45. Men at high risk include African Americans and men who have a close relative who had prostate cancer before age 65. Men at even higher risk (have several close relatives with prostate cancer at an early age) could begin testing at age 40.<sup>1</sup>
- If certain symptoms or the results of early tests suggest one might have prostate cancer, the doctor will use further tests to find out whether the disease is present.
- The prostate biopsy is the only way to know for sure if a man has prostate cancer. During a biopsy, tissue from a man's prostate is removed so it can be sent to the lab to see if there are cancer cells. A core needle biopsy is the main method used.

## **Cancer Treatment**

- Most of the time, prostate cancer grows slowly. Autopsy studies show that many older men who died of other diseases also had prostate cancer that neither they nor their doctor were aware of. But sometimes prostate cancer can grow and spread quickly. Even with the latest methods, it is hard to tell which prostate cancers will grow slowly and which will grow quickly.<sup>1</sup>
- If cancer is present, the biopsy sample will be graded. Grading the cancer helps to predict how fast the cancer is likely to grow and spread. A staging system is a way to describe the extent to which the cancer has spread.
- Surgery, radiation, and hormone therapy are the most common treatments for prostate cancer. Chemotherapy may be used in some cases, and watchful waiting, though not an active form of treatment, may also be used.
- There are risks and significant side effects with all forms of treatment for prostate cancer. They include impotence, sterility, and incontinence.
- Several factors should be taken into account before one chooses a course of treatment. These factors include age, overall health, goals for treatment, and one's feelings about side effects, risks and complications of treatment.. Some men, for example, can't imagine living with side effects such as incontinence or impotence. Others are less concerned about these and more concerned about getting rid of the cancer.
- It is often helpful to discuss treatment options with more than one doctor. Many men find that talking to others who have faced the same issues is helpful.

## **Prostate Cancer Survival Rates**

- Overall, 99 percent of men diagnosed with prostate cancer survive at least 5 years. Ninety one percent of all prostate cancers are found while they are still within the prostate or only in nearby areas. Nearly 100 percent of these men survive at least 5 years. For the men whose cancer has already spread to distant parts of the body when it is found, 34 percent will survive at least 5 years.



## **Sources:**

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