

*From the Parish Nurse*

# Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is one of the most common types of cancer among American men. Age is the most important risk factor for prostate cancer. More than 75 percent of cases are diagnosed in men over the age of 65. The average age at the time of diagnosis is 70. In 2005, thirty-three percent of all cancer cases in men were of the prostate.

Today, more men are surviving prostate cancer than ever before. Treatment can be effective, especially when the cancer has not spread.

Cancer that develops in the prostate may stay localized (entirely contained within the prostate) for many years and cause few noticeable symptoms. Most cases of prostate cancer are slow growing, and symptoms become troublesome enough that they require medical intervention. Symptoms may include but are not limited to urinary flow

difficulties, pain, blood in urine or semen and discomfort in the lower back, pelvis, or upper thighs. Many of these symptoms, however, can also be caused by other conditions, such as [benign prostatic hyperplasia \(BPH\)](#), a [urinary tract infection \(UTI\)](#), acute prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) or others.

BPH is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate that is very common in men as they age, affecting as many as 90% of men by the time they are 80 years old (according to the American Urological Association). It does not cause prostate cancer but both may be found together.

Some prostate cancers, however, do grow and spread aggressively into the pelvic region and then throughout the body. Some slow-growing cancers are eventually large enough and troublesome enough that they

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require medical intervention. The challenge for the doctor is detecting prostate cancer, evaluating its growth rate and spread, and then deciding, along with the patient, what treatment course to follow and when.

Scientists don't know exactly what causes prostate cancer. However, they have been able to identify some risk factor that increases your chances of getting the disease.

A man's risk for developing prostate cancer is higher if his father or brother has had the

disease.

Diet may play a role. There is some evidence that a diet high in animal fat may increase the risk of prostate cancer and a diet high in fruits and vegetables may decrease the risk. Researchers are also looking at diets low in fat and high in soy, fruits, vegetables and other food products along with some supplements such as vitamin E and Selenium to see if they might prevent a recurrence of prostate cancer.

#### **Why get tested?**

The PSA test is a screening test for [prostate cancer](#) in men with and without any symptoms, to help determine the necessity for a biopsy of the prostate, to monitor the effectiveness of treatment for prostate cancer, and to detect recurrence of pros-

tate cancer.

The American Cancer Society believes that health care professionals should offer the prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal examination (DRE) yearly, beginning at age 50, to men who have at least a 10-year life expectancy. Men at high risk, such as African American and men who have a first-degree relative (father, brother, or son) diagnosed with prostate cancer at an early age (younger than age 65), should begin testing at age 45.

Men at even higher risk (because they have several first-degree relatives who had prostate cancer at an early age) could begin testing at age 40. Depending on the results of this initial test, further testing might not be

needed until age 45.

#### **Test results:**

PSA testing is controversial, in that there is not total agreement about when it should be ordered to screen men without symptoms. It should be emphasized the test is less than perfect!

An elevated PSA although associated with prostate cancer does have other causes.

ALWAYS discuss test results with your personal physician. Doctors must determine whether a patient's symptoms are due to prostate cancer, BPH benign, noncancerous enlargement, or to another non-cancer-related condition. The only definitive test for prostate cancer is an actual biopsy of the prostate.

*Information contained in this article has been taken from: Lab Tests on Line, NIH Senior Health, and the American Cancer Society on-line resources.*

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