



Prostate Cancer: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment

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A Growing Concern

Based on year-over-year trends, the American Cancer Society estimates that in 2017, there will be 161,360 new cases of prostate cancer, and approximately 26,730 deaths. One reason for its frequency in recent years is that life expectancy has increased – and paired with the fact that 80% of prostate cancer cases are found in men 65 years of age (or older), the correlation is relatively clear. While the root cause of prostate cancer may not be easily identifiable, the scientific community has come a long way in recent years in terms of understanding the role played by genetics.

Potential Causes and Risk Factors

Researchers note that, in many instances, prostate cancer can be caused by

alterations in the normal prostate cell's DNA. Some changes are inherited genetically, passed on from one generation to the next. As with many cancers, the genetic factor is not to be underestimated. In fact, a man is twice as likely to have prostate cancer if his brother has/had it. Those that have Lynch syndrome, a hereditary disorder caused by genetic changes, also are at higher risk.

Some of these changes, known as acquired mutations, may occur during the course of one's life. One potential source for these acquired mutations is diet, as some studies have suggested that vitamin D deficiency may be a predictor of aggressive prostate cancer. Exposure to certain chemicals may be another source of acquired mutations. A recent study found that U.S. veterans exposed to Agent Orange, a chemical defoliant used during the Vietnam War, had a significantly increased (48% higher) risk of development versus veterans who had not been exposed.

Symptoms of Prostate Cancer

The risk of developing prostate cancer increases once men reach the age of 50. However, one of the more challenging aspects of prostate cancer is that symptoms often do not manifest until later stages of development, since it tends to grow slowly. Below are some of the common symptoms of prostate cancer:

- Frequent urination (especially urges at night)
- Difficulty urinating
- Bladder control difficulty
- Blood in the urine and/or semen
- Swelling in the legs or pelvis
- Chronic bone pain
- Erectile dysfunction

As some men may have an “out of sight, out of mind” attitude toward medical issues, it is vital that they discuss testing with a physician as close to the age of 50 as possible – especially if they've experienced any of the symptoms listed above. Screening is often done either by testing for prostate-specific antigen

levels (PSA) levels in the blood, or by a digital rectal exam (DRE). If the results come back positive, the doctor may wish to test further.

Although screening can help detect prostate cancer, it does not always help gauge the severity or threat level. Additionally, test results may be false-positive (signifying that a man does have cancer when he does not), or false-negatives (signifying that he does have cancer when he does not).

Treatment Options

As mentioned, doctors may not have a full understanding of how threatening a man's prostate cancer may be – which can make it difficult to recommend treatment. Often times, these treatments – done through surgery and/or radiation – can negatively affect various aspects of normal living, especially for older men. Many health communities tend to agree that screening (and potentially treatment) for older men may not be greatly beneficial since they are more likely to die from other conditions, should they exist.

That is not to say that prostate cancer does not pose a threat. While treatment may potentially be more harmful than the cancer itself, it's not to be taken lightly. If your aging loved one is concerned about his prostate and unsure about screening, it's important to begin the discussion with his doctor and to see what the best course of action is, given factors such as age and health.

Screening/treatment should always be mutually agreed upon by both your loved one and his doctor.

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