

Men's Health Guide

Cancer: Early Detection and Prevention

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FACT SHEET

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Everyone wants to enjoy life more. Staying healthy will allow you to do the things you enjoy well into retirement. Participating in early detection screenings will help you catch health problems before they become more serious. Early detection could even increase your life expectancy.

This guide gives practical advice to help men defend against three types of cancer: prostate, colorectal, and testicular. It provides a description of each cancer, risk factors and symptoms associated with each type of cancer, techniques to reduce risk, and tests for early cancer detection. Early detection is key to treating and finding cancers as soon as possible, increases the treatment options, and may decrease the spread of the cancer to other areas of the body. Following your health care professional's recommendations is the best practice for all health care needs. The guide also includes eating tips for a healthy dietary pattern.

Prostate Cancer

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When cancer starts in the prostate, it is called prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in American men following skin cancer.

The prostate is a part of the male reproductive system and produces fluid for semen. The prostate is located just below the bladder and in front of the rectum. It is about the size of a walnut and surrounds the urethra (the tube that empties urine from the bladder).



The prostate tends to increase in size as men get older. As the prostate increases, the urethra gets pinched and it becomes harder to urinate.

What factors increase the chances for prostate cancer?

Aging and being of African American, Hispanic, and Native American descent increases risk. Men of Asian descent have less risk. If your father or brother had prostate cancer, you are more likely to develop it, too. A diet high in fat also increases the risk.

Screening for Prostate Cancer

An enlarged prostate does not mean you have cancer. The best thing to do is get screened. Screening should take place when symptoms are recognized and is recommended for men ages 55 to 69. Men at 70 years of age should consult their health care professional for screening recommendations.

A prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test is a common screening test but the only way to know if

an abnormal test is due to cancer is to perform a biopsy. A biopsy removes a small piece of the prostate to look at under a microscope. The biopsy will show if there are cancer cells.

Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is the third most frequently diagnosed cancer in both men and women in the U.S. and accounts for 9% of all cancer-related deaths. Colorectal cancer begins in the colon or rectum of the body, and often begins as a growth or polyp that develops into cancer. If detected early, colorectal cancer can be prevented or treated without death occurring. The awareness of this cancer and early detection since the 1980s has resulted in a reduction in the number of deaths.

What factors increase the chances for colorectal cancer?

Being older, having a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, or a father or brother with the cancer, being obese, excessive alcohol or tobacco use, or being an African American man may also increase risk. A diet low in fruits and vegetables, low in fiber, and high in processed foods and a lack of physical activity can also increase risk.

Common Problems

There are many other health problems associated with colorectal cancer that may be clues to aid in the diagnosis. If you have any of these symptoms see a physician for proper diagnosis and treatment.

Symptoms include a change in bowel habits or blood in your stool, diarrhea, constipation, or feeling that the bowel does not empty all the way, any abdominal pain, aches, or cramps that don't go away, or a loss of weight you cannot explain.

Screening for Colorectal Cancer

There are several types of screening tests for colorectal cancer. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommend men begin testing at age 45 unless they have an underlying condition that warrants earlier testing. Some tests may be combined

for more accurate screening results. As with any testing, follow your health care professionals' recommendations.

The following four types of tests are most often used to screen for colorectal cancer:

- Fecal occult blood test checks stool for blood. This test is an annual test.
- Colonoscopy looks inside the rectum and colon for polyps and other abnormalities and allows doctors to remove growths or obtain a biopsy during the procedure. A colonoscopy should be performed every 10 years or sooner, as recommended by a health care professional.
- Virtual colonoscopy uses a series of x-rays to create images of the colon and shows polyps or other abnormalities. A virtual colonoscopy can be given at age 45. If there are abnormalities, additional tests would be recommended. This test could also show abnormalities of the kidneys, liver, or pancreas. (www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/x-ray)
- DNA stool test looks at genetic changes in the stool. A DNA stool test should be performed every three years, unless recommended more often by a health care professional.

Although a digital rectal exam is routinely used to screen for prostate cancer, it is not a reliable screening method for colorectal cancer. (www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/digital-rectal-examination)

Testicular Cancer

Cancer that starts in the testicles is called testicular cancer. There are many different places and kinds of testicular cancer. Treatment depends on the specific type of testicular cancer. Testicular cancer occurs most frequently in men 20 to 35 years of age but has a small .0004% chance of occurrence.



Screening for Testicular Cancer

Testicular self-exam is best performed after a bath or shower when the skin is relaxed around the scrotum. Examine each testicle for lumps by rolling it gently between your fingers. Once you become familiar with your body this is an easy and effective way to monitor for lumps. Notice any changes in size, shape, or consistency. One testicle may be slightly larger or hang lower than the other and that is normal. Sometimes the tube on the outer side of the testicle may feel like a small bump. An ultrasound may also be used to find a tumor and is painless. If you have any concerns consult your medical professional. Testicular self-exams should be done monthly.

What factors increase the chances for testicular cancer?

- A testicle that does not drop or come down into the scrotum before birth or within the first year after birth.
- Family history may increase risk.
- Some men with one testicle removed for cancer have an increased risk of cancer in the other.
- Some studies suggest tall men may have an increased risk of testicular cancer while others have not.
- Men with HIV are at an increased risk.
- White men have a 4 to 5 times higher rate of testicular cancer compared to African American or Asian American men.

Common Problems

A lump or swelling of the testicle, breast growth or soreness, lower back pain, shortness of breath, chest pain, or a cough, belly pain, headaches, or confusion are common symptoms of testicular cancer. Symptoms should be discussed with a medical provider for diagnosis and treatment, and early detection may allow for more treatment options before cancer spreads.

Choosing a Healthy Dietary Pattern

Following a healthy dietary pattern can benefit the health of all individuals and may help prevent or lessen the risk of some types of cancers. Focus on eating nutrient-dense foods and drinking low-fat milk and non-sugary beverages.

- Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins and minerals, and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. The core elements that make up a healthy dietary pattern include:
- Eat a variety of vegetables including those that are dark green; red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy; and other vegetables.
- Select whole fruits, frozen, or canned fruit packed in juice or water, not syrup.
- When selecting grain products make at least half of them whole grains.
- Choose fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese, and/or lactose-free versions and fortified soy beverages as alternatives in the dairy group.
- Protein foods should include lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood; and protein alternatives such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, dairy, and soy products.

- Limit saturated fats by select oils that are unsaturated, or liquid, like olive oil, vegetable oils, and healthy fats found in seafood, avocados, and nuts.
- Reduce the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet.
- Drink alcohol in moderation and reduce foods with high or added sugars.

Summary

Your health is important. Taking steps to prevent, detect, and care for yourself now will help you lead a healthier, more fulfilling life. Your family and friends depend on you and want you to be healthy. Early detection is key to preventing and treating cancer. A little time spent now with early detection testing and changing to a healthier lifestyle may allow you to live a long healthy life, doing the things you enjoy well into retirement.

An additional resource to this fact sheet includes a Men's Health Screening Guide. Contact your local extension office/FCS agent for copies.

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