



Prostate Cancer Crisis

One in six men gets prostate cancer, but testing for it has long been unreliable. The answer is **NEW IMAGING TECHNOLOGY**, but you have to demand it to get it. *By Geoff Van Dyke*

PROSTATE CANCER IS THE MOST FREQUENTLY DIAGNOSSED major cancer in men by a long shot. The American Cancer Society estimates that doctors will see 234,460 new cases, and 27,350 deaths, this year. (The next most common major cancer among men, lung/bronchus cancer, will strike only 92,700.) Yet despite its danger and reach — one in six men will get it — prostate cancer remains largely invisible.

And when it comes to detection, invisible is the word. Because the cancer happens deep within the body, a conventional MRI can't reliably spot it. The primary diagnostic tool is a blood test that measures your level of prostate-specific

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antigen, or PSA (a protein given off into the bloodstream by prostate cells). Men with normal prostates have low PSAs; as the prostate grows, PSA levels increase. Your doctor will also administer a digital exam, feeling the prostate with a finger (through the wall of your rectum). But a high PSA or an enlarged prostate does not necessarily mean you have cancer. Even with a biopsy doctors can't be certain about your condition until you go under the knife. And because the prostate sits near your penis and bladder, about half of

the time surgery results in incontinence or impotence.

The solution: better imaging technology. Doctors at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, are working to develop a high-precision MRI, while radiologists at Memorial Sloan-Kettering in New York have had success identifying aggressive cancer through imaging. But these new methods aren't widely available — because men don't ask for them. Across the gender divide, women campaigned for years to win access to mammography, an imaging tool for inspecting the breast. (Breast cancer has a similar reach to prostate cancer, affecting one in seven women.) While mammograms are nearly universal, says Dr. Faina Shtern, CEO of the AdMeTech Foundation, a nonprofit aimed at improved prostate imaging, "only a handful of academic institutions have the kind of high-precision MRI" that could one day make noninvasive prostate cancer detection viable. Dr. Shtern worked on breast cancer imaging at the National Institutes of Health for nine years and points out that prostate cancer research gets a fraction of the funding aimed at breast cancer.

PSA tests, it should be said, are improving. Dr. Richard J. Babaian of the University of Texas recently showed that a "complexed" PSA test was consistently more accurate than a traditional PSA. New York-based Aureon Laboratories has developed a method of combining tissue analysis with data models to more accurately assess the need for surgical removal. Until prostate cancer is something doctors can tackle without endangering one's manhood, however, men need to ask for better options. "Men should be demanding it," says Dr. Shtern. "We shouldn't be making blind treatment choices."

PROTECT YOUR PROSTATE

Your first test for prostate cancer usually happens at age 45 (40 if a relative's had it). Act now to avoid bad news later.



NUTRITION

Asian-born men have a much lower rate of prostate cancer in their home countries, but once they've lived in the United States for a few years they approach a rate close to American-born men. Studies suggest that the fats in American staples like red meat and dairy may increase one's risk. Japanese mainstays appear to lower it. Although clinical studies are inconclusive, the Japanese praise the prostate-protecting effects of polyphenols in green tea and isoflavones in soy. In another major study, the omega-3 acids found in fatty fish lowered the risk of developing advanced prostate cancer. The most well-established prostate protector, however, is the humble tomato. In a 12-year study, two weekly servings of cooked tomatoes (e.g., sauce) cut prostate cancer risk by at least 28 percent.



EXPOSURE TO THE SUN

Getting outside often throughout their lives appears to help men avoid prostate cancer. In a British study, incidence among men with low lifetime sun exposure was three times higher than among men with high lifetime exposure. And an American study found that mortality rates from prostate cancer were twice as high for men not living in a sunny environment. Both studies suggested that a lack of sun-derived vitamin D may be responsible for increased cancer incidence.



EXERCISE

A Harvard University and Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research study established that men under 60 years old with high levels of cardiovascular fitness were four times less likely to develop prostate cancer than men with low levels of cardio fitness. The researchers believe that high testosterone levels contribute to the development of prostate cancer, and that cardio fitness, which tends to lower testosterone, has a protective effect.