[IMAGE]

Taking A Proactive Approach Toward Prostate Care

By Kelly Kwiatkowski and Joe Leonard

In 1994, at age 59, Norman returned from the Gulf War. Aside from tendinitis of the knee, he felt healthy. His PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test was well below the level that indicates cancer. To be safe, his urologist performed an ultrasound and found something that looked like a stone. The biopsy revealed prostate cancer.

A year earlier, in 1993, Michael had gone through a similar experience. He felt perfectly fine when he had a routine medical examination. Although Michael's doctor told him he was too young for prostate cancer, Michael insisted on having a PSA test. Two PSA tests confirmed dangerously high scores, and a biopsy later confirmed the cancer.

These two men, General Norman Schwarzkopf and famed financier Michael Milken, have teamed up to educate the public about the prostate gland, prostate disease and the importance of testing. Although prostate cancer awareness has increased significantly over the past 10 years, the incidence of the disease also has increased. More than half a million new cases of prostate cancer are diagnosed every year, resulting in more than 200,000 deaths worldwide.

What You Should Know About the Prostate

Headshot of distinguished looking older man. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The prostate is a walnut-sized sex gland that surrounds the neck of the bladder and the urethra (a tube that carries urine from the bladder). Its job is to secrete a fluid that forms part of the semen.

Almost all men will have some kind of prostate disease in their lifetime. The causes are not known, but it's speculated that tissue inflammation and an imbalance of male sex hormones, such as testosterone, may be at fault. The most common prostate diseases are benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), inflammatory prostatitis and cancer. BPH is an enlargement of the prostate, and it is very common. It's present in more than 50 percent of men by age 60. As a man ages, his risk increases. When the prostate grows large enough to constrict the urethra, uncomfortable urination problems develop, such as delay and difficulty in initiating a urinary stream, stopping and starting urination several times during voiding, and dribbling at the end of

urination.

An enlargement also may cause the bladder wall to thicken. This can reduce the ability to store urine and results in a frequent need to urinate. The symptoms of BPH and prostate cancer are very similar, so it is important to see your doctor right away if you are experiencing these symptoms.

For men under the age of 50, prostatitis, a benign (non-cancerous), inflammatory condition, is the most common prostate disease - so common, in fact, that some estimates show at least half of all men, at some point in their lives, will develop symptoms. These symptoms can include a frequent and urgent need to urinate; pelvic, groin or low back pain; and pain or burning when urinating. There are a number of treatment options for BPH and prostatitis, and neither disease develops into prostate cancer.

How to Reduce Your Risk

There are a number of risk factors for developing prostate disease. You may have little control over some of them, such as race and family history. Having a father or brother with prostate cancer, for example, doubles a man's risk of developing it. And, it's nearly twice as common for African-American men to develop prostate cancer compared to Caucasian-American men.

Excessive hormonal stimulation also poses a higher risk, as increased testosterone stimulates the growth of prostate cancer cells. Fortunately, you can be proactive and modify certain lifestyle factors, such as diet, exercise and weight, to reduce your risk.

Dietary Support for Your Prostate

Research consistently shows that eating a diet rich in whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains, reduces your risk of many chronic diseases, including several types of cancer. Dietary intake of lycopene-rich foods has been linked to reduced risk of prostate disease. Lycopene is a plant pigment and an antioxidant. Studies show frequent consumption of lycopene-rich foods, especially tomatoes, can lower your risk of prostate cancer by as much as 16 percent to 21 percent.

Man examines an apple for purchase. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Modifying your diet to incorporate whole foods is important to your health, but it's not always easy. Americans typically eat diets rich in refined carbohydrates, sugar, processed foods and saturated fats, which contribute to excessive weight and obesity. Moreover, we eat foods that are nutrient-poor, which is why many of us need

supplements to ensure good nutrition.

Increasingly, we are adding specific supplements to our diet to combat certain health challenges and reduce our risk of disease. In addition to lycopene, supplements that support prostate health include selenium and saw palmetto. Selenium, a trace element, is an antioxidant that might help control cell damage that can lead to cancer. Research shows that men with normal PSA levels who take selenium have a reduced risk for prostate cancer. The most popular herbal supplement in the battle against prostate disease is saw palmetto. Studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing the symptoms of BPH.

When choosing a supplement, it is important to evaluate its ingredients. Supplements that contain whole-food sources are the best sources of these nutrients because they contain all the essential components of the food.

Body Weight and Prostate Health

Being overweight or obese can cause a number of health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, respiratory problems and even death. A survey conducted by the American Cancer Society showed that obesity also increased the risk of prostate cancer.

Diets rich in fat, sugar and red meat, and low in fiber, fruits and vegetables, contribute to being overweight or obese, and are linked to many cancers. The type of fat consumed in your diet also influences your risk. High intake of saturated fat in particular has been linked to increased risk of prostate cancer in several studies.

A diet that is higher in fruits, vegetables, fish, and some kinds of seeds and nuts (such as walnuts and flaxseed) will contain more healthy fats (called omega-3 fats) than a diet full of red meat and dairy foods (which contain more omega-6 fats). You need both kinds of fat in your diet, but the balance is what is important to protect against diseases such as prostate cancer. Increasing the ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fats might reduce prostate cancer tumor growth and PSA levels.

Exercise Supports the Prostate

Exercise has become the solution for just about every ailment, and prostate disease has been added to the list. According to a new study, older men who exercise regularly have a much lower risk - nearly a 70 percent decrease - of developing advanced prostate cancer or dying from the disease.

There is a lot you can do to protect yourself from prostate disease. Be proactive. Eat whole foods, exercise, take whole-food supplements and speak with your doctor about getting tested. This is your best defense against developing any type of prostate disease.

QUICK FACTS

- The American Cancer Society recommends that most men get a prostate test beginning at age 50. Men at high risk, such as African-American men and men with a strong family history, should begin testing at age 45.
- Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) affects 433,216 people in the U.S. each year and caused 430 deaths in 1999. It also accounts for 350,000 to 400,000 operations per year in America.
- There were 218,890 new cases of prostate cancer and 27,050 prostate cancer-related deaths in the United States in 2006.
- It is estimated that approximately $8 billion is spent on prostate cancer treatment each year in the U.S.

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