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factoid

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Q. When should men be concerned about prostate cancer?

A. The prostate is a small, walnut sized gland located in front of the rectum and behind the bladder that produces, stores and transports seminal fluid. Although prostate cancer is the most common form of non-skin cancer among American men, it rarely develops before age 50, progressing slowly, often without symptoms and may require no treatment. In fact, while one in six men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime, only one in 34 will die from the disease.

Because it may develop in the absence of symptoms during its early stages, prostate cancer is frequently discovered through annual physical exams or blood tests, beginning at age 50 for most men or 40 and up for individuals with a strong family history of the disease. When symptoms do show up, they can include blood in the urine or semen, frequent urination, trouble urinating, painful ejaculation or urination, difficulty achieving erections and bone pain in the back, hips, upper thighs or pelvis.

The exact causes of prostate cancer are not yet fully understood, but men in developed countries tend to be at greater risk for the disease. This is likely based on longer life expectancy, diets high in fat and better detection through routine medical screening.

With age, many men will experience a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate, which is unrelated to prostate cancer, but shares some of its symptoms. In both cases, growth of prostate puts pressure on the urethra and interferes with bladder flow, making urination more difficult.

While prostate cancer is a significant health issue later in life, a more immediate concern for many college age men is testicular cancer, which is highly treatable if detected early through self exams. For more information on this and a range of other health issues check out www.health.arizona.edu.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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