

AFRICAN AMERICANS & Prostate Cancer



Christian deBeck, M.D.
UROLOGIST

The prostate. A walnut-sized gland that only men have. A small part of the reproductive system that surrounds the urethra – the tube that carries urine from the bladder to outside the body.

As men age, the risk for prostate cancer increases. Many men with prostate cancer do not experience any symptoms.

All men should be concerned about prostate cancer as they age, but African American men in particular need to be wary of the disease.

Prostate cancer is the fourth leading cause of death among African American men over the age of 45. African American men have a distinctly higher risk of developing prostate cancer than do Caucasian men. Studies show that 19 percent, or nearly one in five African American men, will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetimes. Of those men, five percent will die from the disease.

“In North Carolina, African American men are three times more likely to die from prostate cancer than any other race,” says Christian deBeck, M.D., a urologist at Cape Fear Valley Urology. “But early detection can be the key to better outcomes.”

Medical experts are uncertain what exactly causes prostate cancer, and they are unsure why it is more prevalent in African Americans. Risk factors include:

- Age: Nearly two-thirds of men diagnosed are over 65.
- Race: Prostate cancer is more common in African American men than Caucasians and less common in Chinese and Japanese men.
- Diet: Studies show that men who eat a high-fat diet – especially if it is high in animal fat – may have a greater chance of developing prostate cancer. In Japan, the incidence of prostate cancer has increased as Western diets have been adopted.
- Family history: Having a brother or father with prostate cancer more than doubles or triples a man’s risk of developing the disease.

If your physician feels you are at risk for developing prostate cancer, he or she may recommend a screening for prostate cancer. The main screening tools are a digital rectal exam, where the physician inserts a gloved finger into the rectum to feel the prostate for size and irregularity, and a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test. A PSA test involves taking a small amount of blood to measure antigen levels present. A higher level of PSA in the blood indicates a stronger likelihood that a prostate problem is present.

The American Urological Association, and Dr. deBeck, strongly recommend all men ages 40 and older talk to their physician and have prostate screenings as part of their general health screening.

“Get your PSA once a year after age 40”
CHRISTIAN deBECK, M.D.

Prostate cancer does not need to be terminal. There is something that can be done about the disease.

“We don’t have a good curative treatment for prostate cancer that is found late or has already spread,” says Dr. deBeck. “There is only one kind of treatment that can slow it down, but won’t cure it.”

Nearly 100 percent of men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer in its earliest stages will be alive five years later. Therefore, early detection is of paramount importance.

“Get your PSA exam once a year after age 40,” advises Dr. deBeck. “All men.”



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