

# About Prostate Cancer

## Overview:

- Prostate cancer is the most common non-skin cancer in America.
- In the United States, 1 in 8 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in his lifetime.

Learn more (<https://www.pcf.org/about-prostate-cancer/what-is-prostate-cancer/>) about the symptoms to watch out for, screening recommendations, causes, and survival rates.

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## Symptoms:

Unfortunately, there usually aren't any early warning signs for prostate cancer. The growing tumor does not push against anything to cause pain, so for many years the disease may be silent. That's why screening (<https://www.pcf.org/about-prostate-cancer/what-is-prostate-cancer/the-psa-test/should-i-be-screened/>) for prostate cancer is such an important topic for all men and their families.

When your doctor suspects you may have prostate cancer, what comes next is a careful series of tests and examinations that will confirm the diagnosis and assess the extent of the disease. Most prostate cancer cases are highly treatable, but first, your care team needs to exactly what you're dealing with.

Learn more (<https://www.pcf.org/about-prostate-cancer/what-is-prostate-cancer/prostate-cancer-symptoms-signs/>) and watch the video overview

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## Causes:

If you or a loved one has recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer, your mind might be racing, trying to figure out what happened. What went wrong? What could we have done differently so that this wouldn't happen? The answer is simple, but unsatisfying: doctors and researchers really don't know—yet.

We know that there are a number of risk factors, such as one's racial background, geographical location, family history, and age. (Learn more about [risk factors for prostate cancer](https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/family-cancer-risk/prostate-cancer-risk-factors/) (<https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/family-cancer-risk/prostate-cancer-risk-factors/>)). Additional factors, like smoking, being obese, and consuming too much calcium, seem to factor into more aggressive cases of prostate cancer as well—although these factors are associated with many other health problems, too. Someone who has systemic health issues is going to fare more poorly with any illness.

One of the biggest apparent underlying factors is one we have little control over: our genes. Learn More (<https://www.pcf.org/about-prostate-cancer/what-is-prostate-cancer/prostate-cancer-causes/>) and watch the video overview.

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## Risk Factors:

As indicated by the rates of diagnosis, age is the biggest—but not the only—risk factor for prostate cancer. Other important factors include:

- Family history
- Genetic factors
- Race
- Lifestyle
- Dietary habits

Genes for disease can run in families. Men who have a relative with prostate cancer are twice as likely to develop the disease, while those with 2 or more relatives are nearly 4 times as likely to be diagnosed. The risk is even higher if the affected family members were diagnosed before age 65.

As we begin to unlock the genetic underpinnings of cancer, we realize more and more that men may also be at increased risk of prostate cancer if they have a strong family history of other cancers, such as breast cancer, ovarian cancer, colon cancer, or pancreatic cancer.

Because family members share many genes, there may be multiple genetic factors that contribute to the overall risk of prostate cancer in a family. However, there are also some individual genes that we now know increase the risk of prostate cancer, and men with these genes may need to be screened differently or consider changes in treatment.

Scientists don't yet know why, but men of African descent are over 75% more likely to develop prostate cancer compared with white men, and 2.2 times more likely to die from the disease. **Learn More.** (<https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/family-cancer-risk/prostate-cancer-risk-factors/>)

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## Myths and Non-Risks:

**Sexual Activity:** High levels of sexual activity or frequent ejaculation have been rumored to increase prostate cancer risk. This is untrue. In fact, studies show that men who report more frequent ejaculations may have a lower risk of developing prostate cancer.

**Vasectomy:** Having a vasectomy was originally thought to increase a man's risk, but this has since been disproven.

**Medications:** Several recent studies have shown a link between aspirin intake and a reduced risk of prostate cancer by 10-15%. This may result from different screening practices, through a reduction of inflammation, or other unknown factors.

**Statin use:** The class of drugs called statins – known to lower cholesterol – has also recently been linked to a reduced risk of aggressive prostate cancer in some studies.

**Alcohol:** There is no known direct link between alcohol and prostate cancer risk.

**Vitamin E:** Recent studies have not shown a benefit in consumption of vitamin E or selenium (in the formulations studied) in the prevention of prostate cancer.

(Some of the information on this page is adapted from Dr. Patrick Walsh's Guide to Surviving Prostate Cancer.)

**Learn More** (<https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/family-cancer-risk/prostate-cancer-risk-factors/>)

## Treatment Side Effects:

Because the prostate is close to several vital structures, prostate cancer and its treatments can disrupt normal urinary, bowel, and sexual functioning. This section discusses side effects that might be experienced as well as advice on managing those side effects.

Early management of side effects has been shown to help patients live longer, better lives.

It is very important that you communicate with your doctors about the side effects that you are experiencing as you undergo treatment. Ongoing and proactive communication will enable your doctor to manage your side effects as early as possible to prevent worsening or development of downstream complications.

Learn More (<https://www.pcf.org/about-prostate-cancer/prostate-cancer-side-effects/>)

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## Prevention:

The ultimate goal is to prevent men from developing prostate cancer. Although significant progress has been made and genetic and environmental risk factors for prostate cancer have been identified, the evidence is not strong enough for conclusive recommendations on prostate cancer prevention.

Diet and lifestyle modifications have also been shown to reduce the risk of prostate cancer development and progression, and can help men with prostate cancer live longer and better lives. Learn More (<https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/living-prostate-cancer/prostate-cancer-diet/>)

There are many things that men can do to reduce or delay their risk of developing prostate cancer. Why is prostate cancer so common in the Western culture and much less so in Asia, and why when Asian men migrate to western countries the risk of prostate cancer increases over time? We believe the major risk factor is diet – foods that produce oxidative damage to DNA. What can you do about it to prevent or delay the onset of the disease?

- Eat fewer calories and exercise more so that you maintain a healthy weight.
- Try to keep the amount of fat you get from red meat and dairy products to a minimum.
- Watch your calcium intake. Do not take supplemental doses far above the recommended daily allowance. Some calcium is OK, but avoid taking more than 1,200 mg per day.
- Eat more fish – evidence from several studies suggest that fish can help protect against prostate cancer because they have “good fat,” particularly omega-3 fatty acids. Avoid trans fatty acids (for example, in margarine).
- Incorporate cooked tomatoes (prepared with olive oil), which may be beneficial, and cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli and cauliflower) into many of your weekly meals. Soy-based foods and green tea are also potential dietary components that may be helpful.
- Avoid smoking for many reasons. Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.
- Seek medical treatment for stress, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and depression. Treating these conditions may save your life and will improve your survivorship with prostate cancer.

- Avoid over-supplementation with megavitamins. While a multivitamin is not likely to be harmful, you probably don't need it if you follow a healthy diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and healthy oils. Ask your doctor about herbal supplements as some may harm you or interfere with treatment.
- Relax and enjoy life. Reducing stress in the workplace and home will improve your survivorship and lead to a longer, happier life.
- For men 45 or older (40 or older for African American men or those with a family history of prostate cancer), discuss the risks and benefits of screening with a PSA test and, if indicated, a rectal examination, with your doctor.

Learn More (<https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/family-cancer-risk/prostate-cancer-prevention/>)

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## Prostate Cancer Frequently Asked Questions

- ✓ How common is prostate cancer?
- ✓ How does prostate cancer compare with other cancers?
- ✓ Are some men more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer?
- ✓ How curable is prostate cancer?
- ✓ What are the symptoms of prostate cancer? If there are no symptoms, how is prostate cancer detected?
- ✓ How is prostate cancer treated?
- ✓ Where can I find more information about prostate cancer and the different treatment options available?
- ✓ What can I do to help prevent prostate cancer?
- ✓ What is the Prostate Cancer Foundation doing to find better treatments and a cure for prostate cancer?
- ✓ What should you do if you or someone you love has just been diagnosed with prostate cancer?