

SAVING PROSTATES



Many of you have seen the large billboard advertising pomegranate juice to save prostates, so perhaps we should investigate that and other issues regarding “Saving Prostates”.

SURGERY

Recent studies support the long held belief that we over diagnose prostate cancer in the United States; researchers have shown that as many as 42% of the prostate cancers detected by the PSA blood test would not otherwise have been detected in the person’s lifetime. That is to say that these tumors were so slow-growing that the man would have died of something else, not prostate cancer. So, one way to “save” prostates is not to over diagnose prostate cancer and eliminate needless surgeries such as prostatectomies (or other treatments). But, of course, everyone wants their PSA checked at a physical, and if it is elevated something must be done usually.

Certainly almost everyone agrees that men over the age of 75 should not be tested; other than that, we are still searching for better diagnostic tools to separate a “bad” cancer from a “benign” cancer.

SUPPLEMENTS

What about saving prostates with supplements? The results are all very disappointing. Studies of Vitamin C, Vitamin E, and Selenium supplements have all shown no benefits in terms of prostate health.

FOOD

What you eat may make a difference. Tomatoes, actually cooked tomatoes, have gotten a lot of press recently because of two (2) studies that showed a significant decreased risk of prostate cancer; unfortunately five (5) other studies showed no benefit. But the general feeling is that tomatoes are good because of their Lycopenes (an antioxidant) and most vegetables are probably beneficial. Again, Lycopenes supplements have not been found to be beneficial.

DRINK

Here we have a little better evidence

Red Wine – There are studies that show that men who drink four or more glasses of red wine per week cut their risk of prostate cancer by 50%; the theory is that it is the antioxidant Resveratrol that provides the protection. Resveratrol is also found in peanuts, raspberries, and the skin of red grapes but much less so in the skins of white grapes.



Pomegranate Juice – Intriguing new studies both in mice and now in humans have demonstrated that pomegranate juice appears to significantly slow the progression of prostate cancer; the studies do not show if this magic elixir prevents prostate cancer, but it definitely appears to have a beneficial affect on the prostate.

DRUGS

Although there are many drugs used to treat prostate cancer, including Lupron, Zoladex, Flutamide, Casodex, Nilutamide, and Cyproterone, there is one drug that is marketed to treat BPH, or benign prostatic hypertrophy, that is gaining a lot of interest. That drug is Proscar, or Finasteride. In a recent trial, the Prostate Cancer Prevention Trial, this drug decreased the risk of a man getting prostate cancer by 25%. The drug appears to work in a similar manner as the drugs used to treat prostate cancer, by blocking the enzyme that converts testosterone to its more potent form, dihydrotestosterone. Many urologists are now openly discussing whether all men should be routinely given Proscar to prevent prostate cancer, since the data is very compelling and the side effects are usually minimal.

SUMMARY

Prostate cancer kills over 28,000 men in the United States each year, second only to lung cancer in cancer deaths. If there are ways to prevent prostate cancer, many men would sign up immediately. There is light at the end of the tunnel, maybe in genetics. Although the new information is compelling, nothing is guaranteed, so the best course of action is to discuss the benefits and risks with your physician. Be proactive!

References

Up to date
Medical News Today
Mayo Clinic
Prostate Cancer Research Institute
WebMD
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
Journal of the National Cancer Institute