

# Prostate Cancer – A Growing Problem

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**P**rostate Cancer is a major health problem in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. In Jamaica and most Caribbean territories, it is by far the most common cancer affecting men and the leading cause of cancer deaths in men.

### **Some who have succumbed to Prostate Cancer**

Two Caribbean Prime Ministers, Michael Manley and Lynden Pindling, have succumbed to prostate cancer and it has killed countless others including very important persons such as former Minister Ralph Brown and well known sports administrator Teddy McCook. Other well-known men with a Caribbean link who have had prostate cancer include Colin Powell, Harry Belafonte and Herb McKenley.

### **Prostate Cancer - 50% of Cancer deaths in men**

The Caribbean region has the highest prostate cancer mortality rate in the world with Barbados and Trinidad leading in terms of rates. Prostate cancer accounts for a high as 50% of cancer deaths in men in some countries such as Barbados and in many others the proportion of cancer deaths due to prostate cancer is just slightly lower than 50%. As the populations of most Caribbean territories including Jamaica's is ageing, prostate cancer is expected to become even more common as it is a disease that affects primarily ageing men.

### **Diet Plays an Important Role**

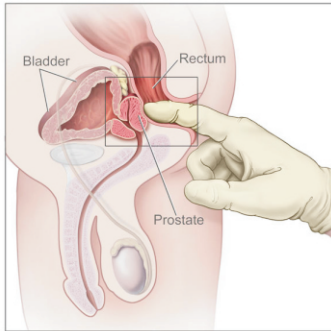
In Jamaica one in every ten men is expected to be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetime. The only established risk factors for prostate cancer including increasing age, Black race and a positive family history of the disease. Diet is also thought to play an important role in the diets rich in red meat, processed meats, saturated fats, dairy products and high calcium intake are thought to promote the development and growth of prostate cancer while diets rich in green teas, soy products, fruits and vegetables, nuts and perhaps fish are protective, although the evidence for these are inconsistent.

### **Who are prone to Prostate Cancer?**

Vitamin D from the body's reaction to sunlight is also protective and therefore some daily sun exposure is thought to be good in preventing prostate cancer. Men with a father or brother with prostate cancer are twice as likely to be diagnosed with the disease and those who have a first degree relative (father or brother) less than 55 years with prostate cancer are especially prone to the disease as there is likely to be a strong genetic component.

## No Symptoms

Prostate Cancer does not typically produce any symptoms when it is still in its early stages and confined to the prostate. That is, before it has spread. As a consequence, if it is to be detected at this early curable stage, screening for the disease is important. Screening is recommended in Black men particularly Caribbean men and especially Jamaican men, beginning at age 40 years and continuing annually until 70 years. Screening involves doing a blood test called the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test and getting a rectal examination in which the doctor inserts his/her gloved and lubricated index finger into the rectum and examines the surface and consistency of the prostate to detect any abnormalities in these features that may be present.



A biopsy of the prostate is indicated if either the PSA or the rectal examination is abnormal. The biopsy involves placing a small ultrasound probe in the rectum to which a needle guide is attached and first injecting local

anaesthetic around the prostate to 'deaden' the nerves. This is followed by at least 12 cores of tissue being taken facilitated by an imaged or picture of the prostate on a television monitor. The specimen is then sent to the pathologist to be prepared and examined under the microscope to determine firstly if cancer is present and



secondly to Grade it and determine how extensive is it.

## When Screening is not advisable

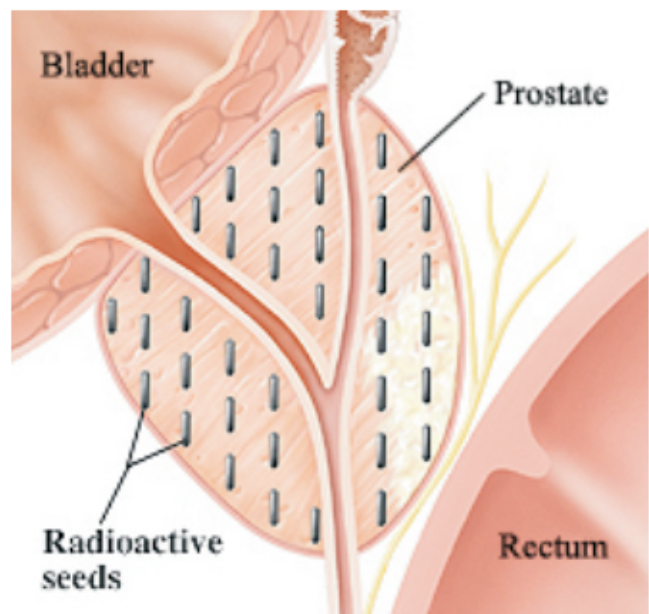
Screening for prostate cancer is not for everyone. If a man aged 40 to 70 years has coexisting illnesses such as severe cardio-respiratory disease that would severely compromise his life expectancy then it does not make sense to screen as prostate cancer usually takes at least thirteen to fifteen years to cause death from the time of early diagnosis. For the same reasons men over 70 years generally are not advised to be screened for prostate cancer.

## When Prostate Cancer is Potentially Curable

Once prostate cancer is diagnosed the next step is to determine the extent of spread of the disease (stage) as this has implications for the type of treatment offered as well as the prognosis. Cancer that is confined to the prostate is potentially curable and generally in the appropriately aged man with at least a ten to fifteen year life expectancy a curative procedure such as radical prostatectomy or external beam radiation will be offered.

## Radioactive seeds

Other alternatives for early disease include brachytherapy (implementation of radioactive seeds) or active surveillance in which the patient is closely monitored for evidence of progression of the disease instead of immediately offering curative treatment. Careful patient selection is very important when choosing these treatments.



## Side effects of treatment

Potential side effects of treatment include erectile dysfunction, urinary incontinence and strictures. The incidence of these are related to surgeon experience and factors such as patient's age and severity of erectile symptoms before surgery, but generally these side effects have declined in frequency and when they do occur can be managed by appropriate use of medications or procedures to enhance well-being and quality of life.

## Prostate Cancer which have spread

For patients with prostate cancer that has spread beyond the confines of the prostate, surgery is not usually the treatment offered. If the cancer has not spread to distant



sites in the body but is just outside the confines of the prostate, a combination of radiotherapy and hormone therapy is typically given. For cancers which have spread to involve bone, lymph nodes and other organs, hormone therapy alone is usually given along with medication to strengthen the bones.

### Avoid all the 'bad foods'

Men diagnosed with prostate cancer should ensure that they exercise regularly, maintain a normal weight, eat judiciously avoiding all

the 'bad' foods mentioned above and should also ensure that they stop smoking if they are in the habit of doing so.

## Smoking

Continuing to be sedentary, to eat 'badly' and to smoke has been shown to shorten survival in men with prostate cancer.



## Healthy Activities

Finally, maintaining a positive outlook, having good family support, getting enough rest and relaxation and reducing stress levels by regularly engaging in activities such as prayer, meditation, exercise, sex, leisure activities and remaining socially connected can only help to mitigate against the adverse effects of the disease.

## Multi-Vitamins and Prostate Cancer

About a third of American adults take some type of multivitamin on a regular basis. In nearly every case, the goal is better health, even though there is no firm evidence to support this hope. The absence of benefit is one thing, but the presence of harm is another: A 2007 report in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* concluded that there was an increased prostate cancer risk among men using multivitamins, reports the October 2007 issue of *Harvard Men's Health Watch*.

When scientists further explored this finding, they found no link between multivitamin use and the risk of developing localized prostate cancer. But they did find that men who take multivitamins more than once a day were 32% more likely to develop advanced prostate cancer and 98% more likely to die from the disease. *Excerpt from Harvard Health Publications - Harvard Medical School.*