

MALE ORDER

New detection and treatments offer breakthroughs for prostate cancer

By RACHEL GRUMMAN
BENDER

BREAKTHROUGHS in both the detection and treatment of prostate cancer have helped lower the death rate of this disease, which often affects men over the age of 5. But the disease is more common than you might think: One in six men develops prostate cancer in America. “If you have a first-degree relative, such as your dad, with prostate cancer or you’re an African-American male, your risk increases to one in three,” says Dr. Philippa Cheetham, a urological surgeon with the department of uro-oncology at Columbia University Medical Center in Manhattan. Here’s a look at some of the medical advancements aimed at beating prostate cancer:

Less invasive testing.

Normally, men 50 years of age and older get a PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood test to check for the disease. If PSA levels are elevated, there’s a one in four chance of the patient having prostate cancer, according to Cheetham. If cancer is suspected, a biopsy — the removal of tissue from the prostate — is performed to determine whether cancer is present. However, more and more doctors are using a less invasive genetic test — called PCA3 — rather than automatically doing a biopsy. With PCA3, a digital rectal exam is performed, which causes cells to shed from the prostate and enter into the urine. A urine sample that contains prostate cells is then collected and sent to a lab for testing. “If PCA3 levels are high, then it supports the fact that the PSA is elevated,” explains Cheetham. “Then you can go back to the patient and explain that [with] the blood test



Lorenzo Ciniglio

Urologists Dr. Aaron Katz and Dr. Philippa Cheetham are encouraged by recent developments in the prevention and treatment of prostate cancer.

and the gene test, the cells are more likely to be cancerous.

The benefits of vitamin D.

Researchers have been working on ways to boost patients’ immune systems naturally so that the body can fight off cancerous cells. “If you can boost your immune system, that may actually prevent you from developing prostate cancer,” says Cheetham. Studies show that taking vitamin D may do just that. “There is increasing evidence that vitamin D is good for your immune health,” she says. “Vitamin D plays a role in protecting against prostate cancer. Those with the lowest levels of vitamin D are more likely to get aggressive prostate cancer. In fact, 74 percent of men with prostate cancer are deficient in vitamin D.” Dr. Aaron Katz, the vice chairman of urology at Columbia University Medical Center, recommends taking 5,000 IUs of vitamin D a day for prostate cancer health, but stresses it’s important to check with your physician first, as well as to have

a blood test six months after beginning taking the supplements to check your vitamin D levels. “Patients need to know there are evidence-based studies on diet,” says Katz. “There’s no doubt that diet is related to cancer, [including] prostate cancer. And we can prevent it.”

The power of medicinal mushrooms.

Research shows that AHCC (active hexose correlated compound) — an extract of several species of medicinal mushrooms — is loaded with antioxidants that enhance tumor surveillance, which helps the body identify and attack cancer cells, according to Cheetham. “The extract enhances your own immune system, which is known to fight cancer,” she says.