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Early Detection and Screening

Facts for men



Let's Make Cancer History

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Early Detection and Screening

Facts for men

It's hard to say why one person gets cancer and another does not. It may seem that cancer can't be avoided, but there are things that you can do to reduce your risk of the disease. You can start by living a healthy lifestyle and taking charge of your health.

This brochure describes four common cancers in men that can be detected early by screening tests or by having signs and symptoms checked by your doctor: **prostate**, **testicular**, **colorectal** and **skin**. Many symptoms can be caused by problems that are much less serious than cancer. See your doctor to be sure. If cancer can't be prevented, treatment is more likely to be successful if it's found early.

Early detection and screening

Early detection means finding cancer at an early stage. When cancer is found early, it is often easier to treat. Recognizing symptoms and getting regular checkups help detect cancer early. Be aware of your body and don't ignore any changes. The sooner you report symptoms to your doctor, the sooner a problem can be dealt with.

Screening is the early detection of cancer by testing or checking for disease when you don't have any symptoms. Many types of cancer don't have a screening test, but some cancers can be found before you've even noticed that something might be wrong. Screening tests can help find cancer at its earliest, most treatable stages. Some screening tests can also help detect precancerous conditions that can be treated before cancer develops. If a screening test shows something unusual, follow-up tests will be needed.

Screening programs that offer screening tests for certain types of cancer are available across Canada. Programs can vary from province to province. These screening programs are offered to people in specific age groups who don't have any signs or symptoms of cancer. If you have a family history of a specific cancer you may be at a higher risk for developing cancer and could be tested at an earlier age or more often. Talk to your doctor about a personal plan of testing.

It's important to know that no screening test for cancer is 100% accurate. For example, a screening test can sometimes show cancer when there isn't, or not show cancer when there is. But overall, screening tests save lives.

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer starts in the cells of the prostate gland. It is the most common cancer in Canadian men and is diagnosed most often in men over the age of 65. Men with a family history of prostate cancer or men who are of African ancestry are at higher risk of developing the disease at a younger age.

What you can do

If you are 50 or older, talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of testing for prostate cancer.

If you are at a higher risk for prostate cancer because of your family history or African ancestry, discuss the possibility of starting testing at a younger age.

These tests may be used for the early detection of prostate cancer:

- **Digital rectal exam (DRE):** a physical exam of the prostate gland through the rectum. The doctor inserts a gloved finger into the rectum to feel the prostate for lumps or anything else that seems unusual.
- **Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test:** a blood test that measures prostate-specific antigen, a substance made by the prostate.

The PSA and DRE tests can help detect prostate cancer early, but they can also cause “false alarms” or miss prostate cancer that is present. In some cases, these tests can detect prostate cancer that may not pose a serious threat to your health. It is important to talk to your doctor about your personal risk of developing prostate cancer, and about the benefits and risks of testing.

What to watch for

These signs and symptoms may be caused by prostate cancer or by other health problems, such as an inflamed or enlarged prostate.

See your doctor if you have:

- the need to urinate often, especially at night
- an intense need to urinate
- difficulty in starting or stopping the urine flow
- an inability to urinate
- weak, decreased or interrupted urine stream
- a feeling that the bladder hasn't completely emptied
- burning or pain during urination
- blood in the urine or semen
- painful ejaculation

Testicular cancer

Testicular cancer starts in the cells of a testicle. While testicular cancer is quite rare, men between the ages of 15 and 49 are at increased risk of developing it. Treatment for testicular cancer is usually successful, especially if the cancer is found early.

What you can do

Become familiar with your testicles and check them regularly. The best time to do it is after a warm bath or shower, when the testicles descend and the muscles of the scrotum are relaxed. See your doctor right away if you notice anything unusual.

Have regular medical checkups by your doctor that include testicular examination.

What to watch for

These signs and symptoms may be caused by testicular cancer or by other health problems. See your doctor if you have:

- a lump on the testicle
- a painful testicle
- a feeling of heaviness or dragging in the lower abdomen or scrotum
- a dull ache in the lower abdomen and groin



Colorectal cancer

Most colorectal cancers start in the cells that line the inside of the colon and the rectum. It is the third most common cancer in Canada for both men and women. Colorectal cancer often grows slowly and in a predictable way. It may not cause any symptoms in its early stages because the lower abdomen (below the stomach area) has lots of room for a tumour to grow and expand. Screening tests help find colorectal cancer before symptoms develop. It can usually be treated successfully when diagnosed early.

What you can do

If you are 50 or older, have a fecal occult blood test (FOBT) at least every 2 years. This test checks your stool for blood that can be seen only with a microscope. Having blood in the stool doesn't always mean that you have cancer. It could have other causes – for example, polyps (non-cancerous tissue growth), ulcers or even hemorrhoids.

If the FOBT shows traces of blood in the stool, follow-up tests may include a:

- **Colonoscopy:** a test that lets the doctor look at the lining of the entire colon using a thin, flexible tube with a light and camera at the end.
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** a test that lets the doctor look at the lining of the rectum and lower part of the colon using a thin, flexible tube with a light and camera at the end.

- **Double-contrast barium enema:** an x-ray of the colon and rectum that uses a special dye (called barium) that helps the doctor see the lining of the colon more clearly.

Some men have a higher than average risk for colorectal cancer. Talk to your doctor about when and how often you should have the tests if you have:

- a parent, brother, sister or child with colorectal cancer (especially if the relative was diagnosed before the age of 45)
- a personal history of colorectal cancer
- already been diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease or polyps
- an inherited condition such as familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer (HNCC)

What to watch for

These signs and symptoms may be caused by colorectal cancer or by other health problems. See your doctor if you have:

- general discomfort in the abdomen (bloating, fullness, cramps)
- a change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea or constipation, for no apparent reason
- blood in the stool (either bright red or very dark)
- stools that are narrower than usual
- an urgent need to have a bowel movement
- a feeling that the bowel hasn't completely emptied

- nausea or vomiting
- fatigue (feeling very tired)
- weight loss

Skin cancer

The different types of skin cancer (basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma) begin in different kinds of cells in the skin. Basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers are very common in Canada, but both types can usually be treated easily and successfully.

What you can do

The best way to prevent skin cancer is to protect yourself from the sun. Here are a few tips on how to stay safe in the sun:



- Protect yourself and your family particularly between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are at their strongest, or any time of the day when the UV Index is 3 or higher. Stay in the shade - under trees, an awning or an umbrella - and try to plan outdoor activities before 11 a.m. or after 4 p.m.
- Cover your arms, legs and head. Choose clothing that is loose-fitting, tightly woven and lightweight. Don't forget your hat to protect your head, face, ears and neck.
- Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Don't forget to apply sunscreen on cloudy days and during the winter.

- Wear sunglasses to help prevent damage to your eyes. Choose glasses with even shading, medium to dark lenses, and UVA and UVB protection.
- Avoid using indoor tanning equipment. Just like the sun, tanning lights and sun lamps give off ultraviolet rays that can cause sunburn, damage skin and increase the risk of skin cancer.
- Check your skin regularly. Get to know the skin you're in and report any changes to your doctor.

What to watch for

These signs and symptoms may be caused by skin cancer or by other skin problems. See your doctor if you have:

- changes in the shape, colour or size of birthmarks or moles
- sores that don't heal
- patches of skin that bleed, itch or become red and bumpy



Preventing cancer

Live well. Make healthy choices.

- Be a non-smoker and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Keep a healthy body weight. Be active and eat well.
- Know the risks of alcohol. The less you drink, the more you reduce your risk.
- Protect your skin. Be safe in the sun and don't use tanning beds.
- Get enough vitamin D from the sun, supplements and your diet.

Be aware. Look after yourself.

- Know your body and watch for signs of cancer.
- Report any changes in your health to your doctor.
- Get screened and help find cancer early.
- Check your family's cancer history.
- Understand how hormones and infections affect your cancer risk.
- Get rid of harmful substances at work and at home.

Get involved. Help reduce risks for everyone.

- Raise awareness about cancer prevention in your community.
- Reduce cancer risks for the next generation.
- Fight for public policy to make healthy living easier for everyone.
- Find out how you can help the Society fight for change right now.

What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer, our services or to make a donation.



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