

Protect your prostate by watching your waist

Since prostate cancer is a common cancer faced by American men, it's understandable that a lot of media and scientific attention should focus on nutrients and phytochemicals that might help prevent this disease. But several recent studies suggest that many men may be overlooking a risk factor that is literally right in front of them: a bulging waistline.

Moreover, several studies now suggest that being significantly overweight may promote the development of a more aggressive form of prostate cancer.

In one of the new studies that show the risk from excessive body fat, among men treated for prostate cancer, those who had gained more than about three-and-a-half pounds a year between the ages of 25 and 40 were twice as likely to have this cancer recur as men who gained less weight.

According to this study, men who were obese when diagnosed with prostate cancer were more likely to have the cancer return than leaner men. The impact on recurrence was even stronger if they were obese by age 40.

Bloods tests for prostate-specific antigens (PSAs) also link obesity with prostate cancer's return after prostate surgery in studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Even after accounting for the stage and type of prostate cancer, increasing amounts of obesity had rising PSA counts and boosted the odds that prostate cancer would return. Researchers say the evidence suggests that obesity creates a more aggressive form of prostate cancer.

Although obesity may worsen the form of prostate cancer and increase the likelihood of its return, an association between excess weight and the risk of getting prostate cancer is not firmly established. Some studies support a link, while others show none.

This inconsistency may mean that some men are more vulnerable to the risk from excess weight. This inconsistency could also mean that lifestyle choices are influential, too. A man's sedentary lifestyle; high fat intake; low consumption of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans; or excessive calories could all contribute to his prostate cancer risk.

Don't forget to exercise Excess body fat that is located in and around internal organs and often indicated by more waistline fat may pose particular risks, even if a man is not obese. In a study that used CT (computed tomography) scans, also known as CAT scans, to measure body fat distribution, men with prostate cancer averaged about 50 percent more total abdominal fat than healthy men of the same age.

Excess abdominal fat could produce hormone-like substances that promote the

development of prostate cancer and other cancers. The elevated levels of insulin and insulin-like growth factors that often accompany excess body fat could also be involved.

Increasing protection against prostate cancer by aiming for and maintaining a healthy weight is by no means incompatible with eating more of the beneficial phytochemicals found in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans. On the contrary, tomato, red grapefruit, garlic, onion, broccoli, cauliflower and other cruciferous vegetables can all be incorporated in a personal health plan that reduces the risk of prostate and other cancers.

For the strategy that offers as much cancer-fighting power as possible, men should include a wide variety of fruits and vegetables throughout their daily meals and snacks. Weight control is also easier when you limit foods that are extra-concentrated in calories – such as fat, sugar and alcohol – and take appropriate portions. Lastly, although we don't know yet whether exercise directly protects men from prostate cancer, exercise should also be a part of your strategy because it's vital to prevent the creeping weight gain that many adults experience.