



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Men's Health: Prostate

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Men's Health Month is marked across the nation in June. It's full of awareness activities and observances designed to encourage boys and men to detect and treat disease in its early stages. Several concerns are associated with the prostate.

We are bombarded in the media with information, or perhaps better put, disinformation, on these subjects. Much of what we see can and should be taken with a strong degree of skepticism. It's important to always keep in mind the motive behind the message. Prostate disease is a great target because it is the number one male cancer. It's important to get reliable, credible information.

The prostate is a gland located deep in the pelvis between the bladder and the base of the male organ. The nutrient rich fluid it produces is secreted into the urethra, which is the drainage channel from the bladder that goes out through the male organ. By nature of its location, it can have an effect on emptying of the bladder. The lower aspect of the prostate gland is accessible by rubber glove exam through the rectum. During this exam, the prostate size, shape and consistency is assessed.

One potential condition is prostatitis. This is an inflammation of the gland and causes various symptoms. Typically, this occurs in young men. Despite being a common problem, understanding of this condition is very limited. It's treated as an infection, but recent information leaves many questions to be answered. Unfortunately, determining the exact cause can be very challenging and elusive.

Another condition, prostatism, is more prevalent in older men. This term refers to common urinary symptoms such as decreased flow rate, getting up at night to urinate, post void dribbling, and hesitancy to start urination. These symptoms are often attributed to prostate disease, the most common of which is benign although other problems such as cancer or infections may be the cause as well. The media is inundated with commercials for medications to treat these symptoms. Some drugs may improve urinary flow by reducing the pressure at the outlet of the bladder while others work by inhibiting the effect of testosterone on the prostate gland.

There is a great deal of discussion about "Low T" or low testosterone. The evidence for benefit of testosterone replacement for most men is limited and far from convincing. It MIGHT help improve energy, strength, and sexual function, but there is no proof it is safe. Testosterone supplementation could stimulate the prostate gland and cause enlargement, or worse yet, perhaps prostate cancer.



Finally, there is debate whether to order a PSA blood test as a means of screening for prostate cancer. Ultimately, this information is used to determine whether someone needs a biopsy. Although there is some evidence that screening for prostate cancer may be beneficial, there is also considerable debate over whether the benefits outweigh the risks and costs. Treatment has significant side effects and many men will die of something else before the prostate cancer becomes an issue. We do know that screening over the age of 75, or if someone has a life expectancy of less than 10 years, is not warranted.

As with all issues of your health, prostate health and screening is an appropriate subject to discuss with your primary care manager in your patient centered medical home. With this discussion, you can determine if it is time for the “rubber glove check”.