

Be Sure To Get His Number...

by Elizabeth Cabalka

You probably have lots of numbers for the man in your life: his cell phone, pager, office number or PIN number. In a world full of numbers, we have one more for you. This number is not simply about convenience and staying connected. This number, and understanding what it means, can save his life. It is called a PSA.

The PSA, or prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screening test, for the man in your life is a fast and simple way to detect prostate cancer. Encouraging him to have an annual prostate exam is one powerful way to say, "I love you."

Undoubtedly you have heard about prostate cancer. Perhaps it has even touched your family. Just in case prostate cancer has not yet entered your awareness, here are a few more numbers you should know:

- In 2005, approximately 232,090 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer, and about 30,350 died.*
- Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death for men in the United States.*
- A man is 33% more likely to get prostate cancer than a woman is to get breast cancer.* (*American Cancer Society 2005*)

With sobering numbers like this, did we get your attention? And it is your attention that can make all the difference. We know you are vitally important to his overall health. Research shows women tend to be more proactive about health issues for themselves and their family, particularly when it comes to getting second opinions and researching different treatment options.

When it comes to prostate cancer, being proactive can be the difference between life and death. Because prostate cancer has no symptoms, annual screening is the key.

Screening recommendations

Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education and Support Network, (www.ustoo.org) located in Downer's Grove, is a tremendous resource for education and support. Us TOO is a grassroots non-profit organization started in 1990 by prostate cancer survivors to serve prostate cancer patients, survivors, their spouses/partners and families. With over 325 support group chapters world-wide and more than 340,000 hits on their website each month, Us TOO is largest prostate cancer advocacy and support organization in the world.

Us TOO recommends that men have annual prostate examinations, which should include both a PSA blood test AND a digital rectal examination (DRE), starting at the following ages:

- By age 40 for African American man, or those with a family history of prostate cancer (either are considered high-risk)
- No later than age 45 for all other men

Moreover,

- It is extremely important to "KNOW YOUR PSA." Keep a record of the exact numbers, not just that it is "in the normal range."
- The first PSA blood test establishes a 'baseline' PSA score. Tracking the PSA from year to year shows if it has increased too much since last year. A rise in PSA levels of 25 percent or more within one year may require further investigation by your doctor. The rate of change in PSA level can be a more significant sign of disease than the actual PSA level.



Us TOO believes that annual testing is so important that men should make it a calendar event such as your birthday, Father's Day or during September, which is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month.

Following these recommendations will help detect prostate cancer earlier, improve the quality of life of diagnosed patients, and decrease the number of deaths caused by prostate cancer. The earlier the disease is detected, the more easily and effectively it can be treated.

A disease of the entire family

A cancer diagnosis can forever change a family. Prostate cancer is a disease of the patient, the partner or spouse, and the family. While the patient experiences cancer in his body, those closest to the patient have an experience of prostate cancer that is also very real.

Us TOO acknowledges prostate cancer's impact on the entire family by creating the Circles of Love Companion & Family Program and Care Kit. More recently, Us TOO and Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization together created the Partner's Program

Guide designed to encourage and enable men and women to work together to fight the battle against prostate cancer.

Become educated and find support

Some believe prostate cancer is an "old man's disease" but that misconception ignores the countless men in their 40s and even 30s now facing prostate cancer. Sadly, many people wait until they receive a cancer diagnosis before they get the facts. One Chicago woman whose husband was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer put it this way. "When my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I realized everything I thought I knew could fit on the head of a pin."

Us TOO International believes that by being pro-active about your family's health and arming yourself with knowledge, you are playing an important role in the health of your loved ones and yourself.

You can participate in awareness opportunities your community as well. A growing number of events, such a Sneakers@Work Day in June and the Annual Greater Chicago Prostate Cancer Run Walk 'n Roll held in September are promoting awareness of this disease and ultimately saving lives.

Become educated about prostate health, encourage the man in your life to get a baseline PSA exam and annual follow up testing. Prostate cancer is something we can no longer ignore. The truth is in the numbers.

Us TOO
PROSTATE CANCER
EDUCATION & SUPPORT

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"Someone to talk to... who understands"