

# Health for Him

## Prostate Cancer – All in the Family

By Elizabeth Cabalka

So, we've all worn pink, or licked a lid, or walked for the girl's, right? A decade ago, this was not the case. Indeed, breast cancer awareness has risen dramatically in recent years, leading to better early detection rates and countless other positive outcomes, in part due to the efforts of former First Lady Betty Ford.

Even so, would you be surprised if I told you that prostate cancer in men is more prevalent than breast cancer in women, currently the most diagnosed cancer in men? In fact, according to the Prostate Cancer Foundation, a man is 33% more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer than a woman is to get breast cancer.

So, why this disparity in awareness and visibility?

Why do we know so much more about breast cancer and so little about prostate cancer? We could point to several reasons but perhaps it is the baby boomers, a very vocal and empowered generation and the largest "at risk" population ever, that is driving the discussion. Whatever the reason, prostate cancer is no longer being talked about in whispers as it once was. It is time to bring prostate cancer into the light.

Frankly, if prostate cancer hasn't touched your family yet, it probably will. Even if you're not married, prostate cancer may be diagnosed in your father, son, brother, grandfather or uncle. Prostate cancer is an intergenerational disease that impacts the entire family, across the generations. This means prostate cancer could dramatically affect **your** life even though you, as a woman, don't have a prostate.

### Prostate Cancer Today

We live in a time where the message of prostate cancer is reaching farther than ever before. While the "at risk" population is growing at a staggering rate, so is awareness and screening. As a result, more men are being diagnosed early, leading to more successful treatment. In some ways, the message about prostate cancer is a message of hope.

The message of hope is that prostate cancer can be very successfully treated when diagnosed early, with most prostate cancer deaths a result of late-stage diagnosis. The good news is:

- more men than ever before are being screened for prostate cancer, also leading to early diagnosis
- we know more than ever about the hereditary nature of the disease, leading to more screening for those who are at risk
- the message of prostate cancer is reaching special at-risk populations, such as the African American community, making a significant positive impact on early diagnosis and successful treatment.

In general, the good news is that more people are living longer, and living well, with cancer.

### Fathers, Sons and Brothers

Even within the messages of hope, there is an undercurrent of the sizeable challenge presented by prostate cancer.

First of all, prostate cancer is an intergenerational disease, impacting grandfathers, fathers and sons. A close family member with prostate cancer increases your risk significantly.

Bill Palos, a thirteen-year survivor, knows all too well that prostate cancer is a family affair. He comes from a family of twelve children, six males and six females. His father and three brothers all had prostate cancer. Bill's dad died in his mid 70s and two brothers died from prostate cancer in their mid to late 60's.

"I caught my cancer very early due to the history of prostate cancer in my



family," says Bill. "My older brother is a seventeen-year survivor and I am a thirteen-year survivor."

Because of the family history of prostate cancer, Bill had been part of a screening program for four years before his diagnosis, getting regular PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) blood tests and DREs (digital rectal exams).

"All my nephews have been advised to obtain, and demand, PSA testing and DRE exams to establish a base line PSA by age 40. In fact, as a result, one of the nephews found he had prostate cancer at age 55 and is currently a three-year survivor."

Some physicians may be reluctant to order early detection testing for men under the age of 50, but a man should insist that they do so if he has prostate cancer in his family history. If caught early, it can increase his treatment options if he is diagnosed and may save his life.

### The Entire Family

We also know that prostate cancer's impact goes beyond heredity in males. There is a growing awareness that prostate cancer impacts the entire family, including the women of the family. While the wives, friends, daughters, aunts and mother's may not have a prostate, they, too, are impacted by the challenges presented by this disease. When someone you love is diagnosed with prostate cancer, your life is impacted as well. And women play a vital role in information gathering, the home environment, meal preparation and nutrition, and overall quality of life. Family care is also vitally important, along with patient care.

Fortunately, those facing prostate cancer, men or women, are not alone.

### Support, Education and Awareness

Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education & Support Network, a non-profit organization headquartered in the Chicago area, provides patients, survivors and their families with support, education and awareness that now reaches farther than ever before.

Founded in 1990 by five men who had been treated for prostate cancer, "Us TOO" was modeled after the success of "Y-ME" National Breast Cancer Organization. With a network of 325 peer-to-peer support groups across the globe, and a website ([www.ustoo.org](http://www.ustoo.org)) that receives about four million hits per year, Us TOO International is needed more and is more relevant than ever before.

At Us TOO International, we believe the time for empowered patients and loved ones is here. Become educated and proactive about prostate cancer. The time is now. You are not alone...



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**Prostate Cancer Patient HelpLine:**

**(800) 80-Us TOO (800-808-7866)**

Email: [ustoo@ustoo.org](mailto:ustoo@ustoo.org)

**[www.ustoo.org](http://www.ustoo.org)**

**"Someone to talk to... who understands"**