

Prostate cancer is the most common diagnosed cancer of men in the United States. Because of blood tests such as the PSA blood test (Prostate Specific Antigen) and a greater awareness for screening, many more men are being diagnosed with early stage prostate cancer. That means the cancer is confined to the prostate gland, without spread beyond the prostate or distant metastasis.

There are several different approaches for the treatment of prostate cancer, and the decision process for the patient can be overwhelming. Early stage disease may be treated with surgery, a procedure called radical prostatectomy where the prostate is removed, or with less invasive procedures such as radiation therapy. Radiation may be given by two different methods; internal or external radiation.

Prostate cancer is common in older men. By age 50, about one-third of American men have microscopic signs of prostate cancer. By age 75, half to three-quarters of men will have some cancerous changes in their prostate glands. Most of these cancers remain latent, producing no signs of symptoms, or grow so slowly, that they never become a serious threat to health.

A much smaller number of men actually will be treated for prostate cancer. About 16 percent of American men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lives; eight percent will develop significant symptoms; and three percent will die of the disease.

Until the last several years, prostate cancer death rates had been rising steadily. For example, in 1932 this cancer killed 17 of every 100,000 American men. By 1991, this number had reached 25 in 100,000. Since then, however, the death rates have been declining. The reasons for both the previous increase and the recent decline in prostate cancer death rates are unclear, but early diagnosis may play a role.

References: American Cancer Society updated 12/1/2005