

Dr. Mulugeta Kassahun, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Urology Specialists of Nevada

Quickly: What is one of the leading killers of black men in the United States?

I doubt you answered prostate cancer. However, the statistics may surprise you. Men of African-American descent are at a significantly higher risk of developing prostate cancer than white men. Among black men, 19 percent — nearly one in five — will be diagnosed with prostate cancer, and five percent of those will die from the disease. In fact, prostate cancer is the fourth most common cause of death in black men.

While black men are already at an increased risk for prostate cancer, their risk increases dramatically if there is a family history of prostate cancer. Black men with an immediate family member who had prostate cancer have a one in three chance of developing the disease. Their risk rises to 83 percent with two immediate family members having the disease, and skyrockets to 97 percent if they have three immediate family members who developed prostate cancer.

So what's a man to do? Get regular screening — and get it early. Prostate cancer is highly treatable when caught early. The American Cancer Society recommends that black men discuss testing with their doctor at age 45, or at age 40 if they have several close relatives who have had prostate cancer before age 65.

Screening tests can include a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and/or a digital rectal exam (DRE). Both tests can be usually be done by your family doctor or urologist.

In addition to recognizing the need for early screening, black men should

be aware of the signs and symptoms of prostate cancer. These symptoms can include urinating in the middle of the night, needing to urinate more frequently, and feeling like the bladder doesn't completely empty. Blood in the urine may also be a sign of prostate cancer. It's important to note, however, that these symptoms are not sure-fire signs of cancer and can be other bladder issues.

It is important for black men to talk to their doctor about diagnostic testing for prostate cancer if they are experiencing any of these symptoms. Black men also need to have a discussion with their doctor about the benefits and limitations of screening for early prostate cancer detection.

As men of our community, we need to be aware of the risk. Don't ignore the symptoms. Finding the disease and treating it early leads to positive outcomes for you, and the people who are important to you.

About Dr. Kassahun:

Dr. Kassahun is a native of Ethiopia and is fluent in Amharic (Ethiopia's official language). He was a clinical pharmacist in Denver before deciding to pursue a medical degree, and to specialize in urology. He has been with Urology Specialists of Nevada since 2004 and he practices all forms of general urology with special interests in urologic oncology, laparoscopic and robotic surgery. He is active in the U.S. Army Reserves and served two tours of duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, with the last tour in Balad, Iraq. He enjoys jogging and is an avid reader.

