Prostate Cancer News

The pros and cons of early screening

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Does early screening work for all cancers? Studies show that mammograms for breast cancer and Pap smears for cervical cancer can increase women's chances of survival. For men, however, some experts believe that prostate specific antigen (PSA) screenings, which detect proteins produced by both cancerous and non-cancerous prostate tissue, may not help prolong life.

On the plus side, prostate screening, which can be done in a blood test, is painless and it may:

- detect prostate cancer that's likely to spread to other parts of the body.
- reveal a quick-growing cancer that's likely to cause other problems.
- prompt early treatment that can help kill the cancer before it becomes life-threatening, allowing men to avoid more aggressive treatment.

On the minus side, prostate screening may lead to:

- incorrect results—false positives or false negatives.
- invasive, stressful, expensive or time-consuming follow-up tests.
- treatments or therapies that cause side effects more harmful than those produced by an actual untreated cancer.

The bottom line: Black men have the highest incidence rate of prostate cancer and are twice as likely to die of the disease than white men. The American Cancer Society suggests that black men 45 and older with a family history of cancer be tested annually. Talk to your health care practitioner about how screening risks and benefits apply to you.

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