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Prostate Cancer: Weighing Options

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A handful of doctors in the U.S. -- and many more in Europe -- use color Doppler ultrasound imaging to monitor prostate cancer patients. Real-time ultrasound imaging can be done painlessly in a doctor's office. Areas of increased blood flow that signify cancer show up in color. "The ultrasound differentiates not just cancer, but which cancers are lethal," says Robert L. Bard, a radiologist in New York City, who has been monitoring about 3,000 prostate-cancer patients.

Other doctors who use Doppler ultrasound caution that nothing is 100% accurate -- but it can provide more reassurance for patients monitoring their cancer. A biopsy targeted at suspicious areas can help verify whether a tumor is changing.

Diet and Exercise

Besides being conscientious about followup exams, patients can help their own cause by maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle. "Active surveillance also means you are going to change your life and do things that can slow the cancer down," says Charles Myers, former chief of clinical pharmacology at the National Cancer Institute and a prostate-cancer survivor himself who now treats patients in Charlottesville, Va.

Dr. Myers says it's critical to maintain an adequate level of vitamin D, which can help keep cancers in check. Many older people are deficient. Studies have also shown that a Mediterranean diet -- with plenty of fish, olive oil and vegetables -- can slow cancer growth, along with vitamin E, selenium, lycopene, omega 3 fatty acids and green tea polyphenol, as well as avoiding animal fat.

Getting exercise and minimizing stress can go a long way as well. Stress hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine help prostate-cancer cells grow and impair the immune system.

"I'm proud of what I'm doing," says Ronald Zaza, who was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1996, six weeks after having quadruple bypass surgery. He has since abandoned meat and chicken for vegetables and tofu, started running marathons and is monitoring his cancer once a year with a color Doppler ultrasound. So far, it's not showing any suspicious areas, and Mr. Zaza says, "I'm 71 and just ran a marathon. I feel like I'm 35."

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