

Sunlight exposure may cut prostate cancer risk

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A new study suggests the more sun a man gets, the smaller his chances of developing prostate cancer. In fact, more exposure could reduce that risk by as much as half.

Spending time in the sun seems to increase a man's vitamin D levels and therefore lower his risk for the cancer. But because tanning and burning actually raise skin cancer risks, researchers suggest vitamin D in supplement form may be a safer option.

Researchers from three U.S. cancer centres compared the lifetime sun exposure of 450 men with advanced prostate cancer with a control group of 455 men without the disease.

They found that the men who had spent more time in the sun over their lives were at half the prostate cancer risk of men with low sun exposure. In men with certain vitamin D receptor genes, the risk was reduced even further to as much as 65 per cent.

People living in the north tend to get less time in the sun than those in southern climes.

"We believe that sunlight helps to reduce the risk of prostate cancer because the body manufactures the active form of vitamin D from exposure to sunlight," research team leader Esther John, of the Northern California Cancer Center, said in a statement.

The findings appear in the June 15 issue of the journal *Cancer Research*.

Previous studies have shown that the prostate uses vitamin D to promote the normal growth of prostate cells and to slow the spread of prostate cancer cells to other areas of the body.

CTV's medical consultant Dr. Marla Shapiro points out men shouldn't spend more time sunbathing just to prevent prostate cancer.

"The bottom line is in Canada and in many places in North America, in the winter months we do not absorb vitamin D even if we're outdoors because it's not in the UV rays that we're exposed to," she told Canada AM.

Shapiro and the study's researchers suggest instead that men begin taking a multivitamin containing vitamin D.

"A multivitamin has 400 international units of vitamin D and is so easy

to take and an easy thing to do in terms of maintaining prostate health," says Shapiro.

"We know vitamin D will promote healthy prostate cells as well as slowing down carcinogenesis, which is the progression of cancer."

Shapiro notes that multivitamins also contain other nutrients that will improve prostate health.

"There are many trace micronutrients that will be present in a vitamin but that are hard to get in your diet: vitamin E, for example, has been found to benefit prostate health; selenium, another trace mineral that is hard to get in your diet; there's a lot of talk about lycopene, which is in tomato products.

"If you look at a multivitamin, it's going to give you your 400 IUs of e, your 400 IUs of d, your selenium, and it's probably a very good tool for you to be taking on a regular basis in terms of promoting health."

At least one in seven Canadian men is expected to develop prostate cancer in their lifetime, and one in four of them will die of it.

Approximately 20,500 Canadian men are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year and those numbers are expected to increase as the Baby Boom generation of men enters its prostate cancer risk years.

It is the most common cancer in men, and the second most deadly form of cancer among males after lung cancer.