

Prostate cancer and the risk of depression/anxiety



FACT SHEET 34

Prostate Cancer can not only take its toll on a man's body, but also on his mind. This fact sheet looks at:

- What is prostate cancer?
- What is depression?
- What is anxiety?
- What are the links between depression, anxiety and prostate cancer?
- How can depression/anxiety be treated in men with prostate cancer?
- How to help yourself or another person to recover.

WHAT IS PROSTATE CANCER?

Prostate cancer is a form of cancer where an abnormal growth of prostate cells leads to the growth of a lump (tumour) in the prostate gland. If left untreated, this may spread to other parts of the body, particularly the bones and lymph nodes.

Prostate cancer is common – one in nine men in Australia will develop prostate cancer in their lifetime.¹

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

The word 'depression' is often thought to mean sadness or a low mood. However, depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness for which effective treatments are available.

Men may experience a range of different emotions and feelings after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. They often describe feeling "in shock" or "numb" after hearing the diagnosis. Other common reactions include feeling anxious or nervous and sometimes, sad and distressed. Being diagnosed with prostate cancer can be a difficult time for many men and it is normal to feel upset or angry.

Some men, however, experience these feelings intensely and for long periods of time. Having a depressed mood can extend beyond the issue of cancer and into all areas of a person's life. Men with depression find it hard to carry out their normal daily activities.

Depression is very common. Around one million Australian adults live with depression each year. On average, one in eight men will experience depression in their adult lifetime.²

¹ Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia. Accessed online 5/11/08: <http://www.prostate.org.au/prostate-cancer-related-statistics.php>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results (4326.0). Canberra: ABS.

DO YOU HAVE DEPRESSION?

You may be depressed, if for more than **TWO WEEKS** you have:

1. Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time?
2. Lost interest or pleasure in most of your usual activities?

If you answered 'YES' to either of these questions, complete the symptom checklist below. If you did not answer 'YES' to either of these questions, it is unlikely that you have a depressive illness.

Have you:

3. Had a change in weight? OR
Had a change in appetite?
4. Experienced sleep disturbances?
5. Felt slowed down, restless or excessively busy?
6. Felt tired or had no energy?
7. Felt worthless, excessively guilty OR
Felt guilt about things without a good reason?
8. Had poor concentration? OR
Had difficulties thinking? OR
Been very indecisive?
9. Had recurrent thoughts of death?

Add up the number of ticks for the total score: _____

What does your score mean?

(Assuming you answered 'YES' to questions 1 and/or question 2)

4 or less: You are unlikely to be experiencing a depressive illness

5 or more: It is likely that you may be experiencing a depressive illness

References: American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 4th ed (DSM-IV). Washington, DC: APA, 1994; and, International classification of diseases and related health problems, 10th revision. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1992-1994.

It's important to note that **scores provide only a rough guide as to whether you may have depression.** If you have ticked **five or more** of these statements, consult a health professional as you may have a depressive illness.

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WHAT IS ANXIETY?

An anxiety disorder is more than just feeling stressed – it can be a serious illness. People with anxiety disorders find it hard to function every day. **Research indicates that men who have been diagnosed with prostate cancer may be more likely to experience an anxiety disorder (in particular generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder) than men in the general community.**³ Partners of men with prostate cancer are also at risk of developing an anxiety disorder.

There are many types of anxiety disorders, each with a range of symptoms. A number of different factors surrounding diagnosis, treatment and remission of prostate cancer may contribute to the development of an anxiety disorder in men and their partners.

For example, concerns about prostate specific antigen (PSA) levels, concerns about treatments and potential side-effects, and fear of recurrence of the cancer may compound the person's anxiety.

For more information on anxiety disorders, symptom checklists and treatments see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 21 – Anxiety disorders or visit the *beyondblue* website www.beyondblue.org.au

WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND PROSTATE CANCER?

Men with prostate cancer are nearly twice as likely to develop depression as men in the general community.²

Partners of men with prostate cancer are also at risk of developing depression. There are many factors that may put a person at risk of developing depression.

- **Personal history:** Men who have experienced depression before being diagnosed with prostate cancer are more likely to become depressed compared to men without a history of depression.
- **Lifestyle factors:** Having prostate cancer can cause worry, stress and sadness, which may put a man at risk of experiencing depression. Having prostate cancer may make it seem like an effort to keep active and connect with family members and friends. This may lead to a person feeling isolated and therefore make it harder to recover from depression.

- **Biological factors:** Changes in chemicals in the brain caused by treatment for prostate cancer can put men at greater risk of depression. For example, hormonal treatments are common in the treatment of prostate cancer and can cause mood changes such as depression.
- **Physical factors:** Depression may be harder to diagnose in men with prostate cancer because common physical symptoms, such as feeling tired or losing weight may be attributed to prostate cancer or side-effects of its treatment, when in fact they could be signs of depression.

CAN DEPRESSION AND/OR ANXIETY BE TREATED IN MEN WITH PROSTATE CANCER?

Depression and anxiety are treatable and men can recover with the right advice and help. There is a range of treatments that can be effective for men with prostate cancer and depression and/or anxiety. Treatment may include psychological therapies and/or medication.

Psychological treatments

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

When people are depressed and/or anxious, they often have unhelpful and negative ways of thinking about situations. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy helps people learn to identify and change these negative ways of thinking. CBT is a structured program which recognises that the way people think affects the way they feel.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)

The way people get along with others is important to how they feel. Interpersonal Therapy helps people find new ways to improve relationships in order to begin feeling better.

Medication

If a man is only mildly or moderately depressed, psychological treatment alone may be effective. However, if depression is severe or persists, medication is often also needed.

Antidepressant medication (which is also used to treat anxiety disorders) can take seven to 21 days to work effectively and should not be started or stopped without medical advice. Alcohol use can also affect medication.

³ Couper, J.W., Bloch, S., Love, A., Duchesne, G., Macvean, M. & Kissane, D.W. (2006) The psychosocial impact of prostate cancer on patients and their partners. *MJA*, 185 (8), 428 – 432.



It's important that any current medication for prostate cancer and over-the-counter medications, including herbal or natural remedies, are reviewed by a medical practitioner before a person starts taking antidepressants.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR MANAGING DEPRESSION AND/OR ANXIETY

If you suspect you or a person for whom you care may have depression and/or an anxiety disorder – or you have been diagnosed with depression and/or an anxiety disorder – the following tips may be helpful.

- Speak to a doctor about your concerns and discuss treatment options.
- Accept help, support and encouragement from family and friends.
- Reduce isolation by becoming involved in social activities.
- Exercise regularly (see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 8 – Keeping active).
- Eat healthily and include a wide variety of nutritious foods (see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 30 – Healthy eating for people with depression, anxiety and related disorders).
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Get enough sleep (see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 7 – Sleeping well).
- Limit alcohol intake (see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 9 – Reducing alcohol and other drugs).
- Allow yourself time to relax and reduce your stress (see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 6 – Reducing stress).
- Go to a doctor for regular check-ups.

ADVICE FOR PARTNERS AND CARERS

When a man has prostate cancer and depression/anxiety it can affect family members, carers and friends. Carers and partners are also at an increased risk of depression/anxiety, so it's important that you look after your own health.

- Eat well, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, limit alcohol intake and avoid other drugs.
- Allow yourself time to relax and participate in enjoyable activities. Plan activities like social outings and gentle exercise.
- Look for symptoms of depression/anxiety in yourself and seek help at the earliest sign.

- Seek support from professionals. This may involve having counselling or attending a carer support group.
- Find ways to ease the load e.g. taking Carer's Leave from work.
- For more information on stress-management techniques, read *beyondblue* Fact sheet 6 – Reducing stress.
- For more information on how to help someone with depression see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 1 – How can you help someone with depression?

WHERE TO GET HELP

- **A doctor who is a General Practitioner (GP)** is a good first step. If GPs have additional training, they can also provide psychological treatments or if not, a referral to a mental health specialist.
- **Psychiatrists** are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychological assessments, conduct medical tests and prescribe medication. Some psychiatrists use psychological treatments such as CBT and IPT.
- **Psychologists** specialise in providing non-medical (psychological) treatment for depression and related disorders. Clinical psychologists have additional training in mental health and psychological therapies such as CBT and IPT.
- **Social Workers and Occupational Therapists in Mental Health** provide counselling and support to assist people to cope and manage depression/anxiety.

MEDICARE REBATES

A rebate can be claimed through Medicare for 'Psychological Therapy' or 'Focused Psychological Strategies' when a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician refers a person to a clinical psychologist, registered psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist in mental health. A rebate can be claimed for part of the cost of up to 12 individual consultations (more in exceptional circumstances) and 12 group sessions in a calendar year. For more details, ask the referring medical practitioner or see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 24 – Help for depression under Medicare.

If the mental health practitioner bulk-bills, there will be no upfront charge and therefore no reason to claim a rebate.

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For a list of health professionals with expertise in treating depression/anxiety, go to the *beyondblue* website: www.beyondblue.org.au and click on Find a Doctor or other Mental Health Practitioner or call the *beyondblue* info line on 1300 22 4636 (local call cost from a landline).

MORE INFORMATION

beyondblue: the national depression initiative
www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and related alcohol and drug problems, available treatments and where to get help

***beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636**

Information on depression, anxiety and related drug and alcohol problems, available treatments and referral only (local call cost from a landline)

www.youthbeyondblue.com

beyondblue's website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend

Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia

www.prostate.org.au
1800 22 00 99

Information about prostate cancer and where to go for support and help, including state and territory prostate cancer support groups

The Cancer Council

www.cancer.org.au
13 11 20

Information about cancer and where to go for support and help

The Lions Australia Prostate Cancer Website

www.prostatehealth.org.au

Information about prostate cancer, support groups, news and an email helpline

Andrology Australia

www.andrologyaustralia.org
1300 30 38 78

Information on male reproductive health

Foundation 49

www.49.com.au
03 9508 1567

Information on men's health

Mensline Australia

www.menslineaus.org.au
1300 78 99 78

24 hour telephone support, information and referral for men

Carers Australia

1800 242 636
www.carersaustralia.com.au

Information, referral and support for carers

FURTHER READING

beyondblue has information resources that can assist men with prostate cancer and their partners. All *beyondblue* resources can be ordered from the *beyondblue* website www.beyondblue.org.au or the *beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636.

- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 12 – Depression in men
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 23 – Chronic physical illness and depression
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 21 – Anxiety disorders
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 1 – How can you help someone with depression?
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 6 – Reducing stress
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 7 – Sleeping well
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 8 – Keeping active
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 9 – Reducing alcohol and other drugs
- *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 30 – Healthy eating for people with depression, anxiety and related disorders
- *Taking care of yourself and your family: a resource book for good mental health* by John Ashfield

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beyondblue is proud to acknowledge the support of Movember in raising awareness of depression, anxiety and prostate cancer.

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