

CAN FREQUENT SEX SAVE YOU FROM PROSTATE CANCER?

Danger lurks for sexually inactive men, especially those above the age of 40, a Ugandan cancer expert has said.

Public health oncology specialist and educator at the Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), Dr Alfred Jatho, has, therefore, recommended that if one is to increase their chances of surviving prostate cancer, they have to engage in the between-the-sheets activity more often.

He recommends that men having sex about four to five times every week may help reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

Jatho made the remarks on Wednesday last week at UCI, where government communicators had gathered for a free prostate cancer screening exercise.

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020, or nearly one in six deaths, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The most common cancers are breast, lung, colon, rectum and prostate.

Prostate cancer accounts for approximately 15% of all new cancer diagnoses among men worldwide, and the burden of disease continues to increase globally.

In Uganda, prostate cancer is the second most common cancer among men, with over 2,086 cases recorded in 2018. It involves the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the prostate gland, a male reproductive gland that is located below the bladder. It is one of the most common cancers in men and can often grow slowly, with many cases being curable when detected



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early.

However, the disease is usually diagnosed when it is 'too late', resulting in the death of most patients. Several studies indicate that the majority of the patients diagnosed with prostate cancer at UCI presented with advanced disease.

The primary treatments were mostly chemotherapy, hormonal therapy and radiotherapy. Despite this, many men continue to delay screening due to stigma, myths and fear, resulting in late-stage diagnosis and high mortality. Even though the most commonly registered cancer over the 25 years was Kaposi Sarcoma (KS), recent studies suggested an increase in prostate, breast and cervical cancers in Uganda, according to a 2022 study titled Infection-related and lifestyle-related cancer

burden in Kampala, Uganda: Projection of the future cancer incidence up to 2030.

"The projection model predicted that prostate cancer incidence will increase by 33.4% between 2011–2015 and 2026–2030. The number of new prostate cancer cases was reported as 600 in 2011–2015 and is predicted to increase to 800 new cases in 2026–2030. More cases were observed among men aged 60 years and above and the number of cases will be expected to continually increase in the future across all age groups," the study said, adding that the increase will be 'concentrated in men aged 50+ years'.

Jatho said while many people believe multiple sexual partners influence prostate cancer risk, research shows otherwise.

"Research has not shown

AGE MATTERS

Other experts have given conflicting views about Dr Alfred Jatho's link of sex to prostate cancer protection. When contacted, Dr Noleb Mugisha, the head of community cancer services at Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), explained that the risk of developing prostate cancer increases with age. He said the second risk factor is family history. "If someone from your father or mother's side suffered prostate cancer, what we call a family of prostate cancer, then you are also at a higher risk. A family history of breast cancer can also put someone at a high risk of suffering from prostate cancer," Mugisha said. "Then being overweight or fat. High fat diet that involves lipids that are solid and at room temperature puts one at risk. However, this does not include cooking oil," he added.

However, Mugisha argued that having sex many times may not necessarily take away the risk of developing prostate cancer although "sex is important for you and your wife." Dr Okuku Machyo from UCI also reiterated Mugisha's remarks, noting that cancer of the prostate rarely affects young men. However, he advised young men that they should endeavour to go for check-up when they hit the age of 40. "The message to young men is simple; that if they hit 40 years, and have a family history of prostate cancer, should start checking as early as 40," he said.

that having many sexual partners increases or reduces prostate cancer risk," he said.

Jatho added that recent studies suggest that moderate sexual activity can be protective. Not having sex at all is not good and having too much of it is also not good.

On average, he said, about four-five sexual intercourse episodes within one week show to be more protective for men, mainly due to regular ejaculation.

Jatho stressed that Uganda cannot afford to lose men in their most productive years.

"Young men in their 40s and 50s should not be dying

from preventable diseases like prostate cancer. Uganda needs them for social and economic development. Dying before 75 years is considered premature death," he said.

Jatho's explanation is supported by some studies. A 2017 research report published by the US-based National Library of Medicine Journal revealed that men who reported 21 or more ejaculations per month (EPM) during adulthood had a significantly lower risk of being diagnosed with prostate cancer compared to men reporting four-seven

ejaculations.

The study followed 31,925 men from a large US-based cohort over 18 years (1992–2010), tracking how often they ejaculated at different life stages (ages 20–29, 40–49 and the year before the survey).

Men in the highest ejaculation-frequency group had about 19%–22% lower risk of prostate cancer, compared with their counterparts in the four to seven EPM group.

THEORY DEBUNKED

Dr Okuku Machyo from UCI debunked the belief that frequent sex could protect men from sex, noting that proponents, including oncologists, "are reading some published documents that have been misinterpreted by the general public. In the document, it is said they looked at 10,000 and looked at men who had a history of multiple ejaculation and associated it with prostate cancer, but that study didn't say or conclude that men who don't have prostate cancer is because they had multiple ejaculation or multiple sex partners."

WARNING SIGNS

According to Harvard Medical School, most men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer, including many with advanced forms of the disease, do not present with symptoms.

When symptoms do appear in a man with early-stage disease, they affect his ability to urinate. This manifests through lower urinary tract symptoms, including urinary frequency, urgency, difficulty starting or stopping a stream, getting up repeatedly at night to pee, or feeling like you are never able to fully empty your bladder.