

Prostate cancer risk factors include some that can't be changed, such as having a family history of the disease and a genetic predisposition for developing the cancer. But other risk factors may be adjusted to help lower the likelihood of developing prostate cancer.

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU

Are you young and have you had blood in the urine, which might make the urine look pink, red, or cola-coloured, blood in the semen, need to urinate more often, trouble getting started when trying to urinate, or waking up to urinate more often at night? If yes, then you may need to visit the nearest cancer screening facility to check for prostate cancer.

Also, are you of advanced age and have accidental leaking of urine, back pain, bone pain, difficulty getting an erection, feeling very tired, losing weight without trying, or weakness in the arms or legs? You also have a reason to see the nearest cancer screening facility to check for prostate cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society and Mayo Clinic, prostate cancer is a growth of cells that starts in the prostate. The prostate is a small gland that helps make semen and is found just below the bladder, which is part of the male reproductive system.

Prostate cancer forms when the DNA in prostate cells develops mutations that may disable their ability to control cell growth and division. In many cases, these mutated cells die or are attacked by the immune system.

However, some mutated cells may escape the immune system and grow out of control, forming a prostate tumour.

Globally, it is one of the biggest types of cancers affecting men, and the trend is similar in Uganda, where up to more than 22,000 men are battling the disease.

According to the Uganda National Cancer Control Plan 2025/2026 – 2029/2030, cancer is one of the biggest health problems the country is grappling with.

Dr Jackson Orem, the executive director of Uganda Cancer Institute in the executive summary of the control plan, says that in 2022, it was estimated that there were 35,968 new cancer cases, 24,629 cancer deaths, and 62,548 adults living with cancer in Uganda.

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, by 2040, there will be 77,510 new cancer cases per year, an increase of 138 percent.

UCI says recent data show an increase in the incidence of prostate, breast, and other cancers due to changes in lifestyle-related cancer risks. According to the data, in 2022, prostate cancer numbers among men stood at 2,699, representing 17.5 percent of all the cancer types men have contracted.

The exact causes of prostate cancer in an individual patient may not be clear. However, understanding the risk factors may help men take preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of developing prostate cancer.

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Why you should test for prostate cancer early



Doctors attend to a patient at Mulago National Referral Hospital, on August 15, 2023. PHOTO/FILE

having a family history of the disease and a genetic predisposition for developing the cancer. But other risk factors may be adjusted to help lower the likelihood of developing prostate cancer.

Dr Ahmed Hamza, associate professor and consultant urologist at UMC Victoria Hospital in Kampala, said that while prostate problems can occur at any age, when detected early, prostate cancer is curable.

Dr Hamza says while the disease can be treated when detected early, many patients fear testing for prostate cancer and therefore delay until it is too late.

"Fearing doing the test is not a good idea because as soon as you sort out the issue, it can be curable. Usually, we test for prostate cancer at age 45 or 50. But when someone in the family has a positive history of prostate cancer, it is important to check at age 40," he explains.

Dr Hamza adds: "So it is important to check the PSA (prostate-specific antigen test) and then we can advise what should be done and the patient should

not fear testing for the prostate."

Currently, the cost of testing prostate cancer in several health facilities is about Shs300,000, but the Uganda Cancer Institute says it provides free prostate cancer screening. At UMC Victoria hospital, the facility runs discounted testing and treatment at Shs100,000 every November, which is the prostate cancer awareness month.

Dr Hamza says men should take precautions with their lifestyles, especially those with advanced ages because prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men all over the world.

"So it is very important to check as early as 40 or 45 years of age so as to avoid all the complications and to be treated early," he says.

Cancer and mental health

Ms Brenda Nalugo, a clinical psychologist at UMC Victoria Hospital, says while mental health has been a big issue, particularly among men, the risk of being diagnosed with prostate cancer wors-

ens it.

She says when testing positive, some will deny it, others accept, and others mentally break down, which is a big problem.

"We find that when people get the diagnosis of prostate cancer, they go through what we call the five stages of chronic illness. They go through denial, anger, acceptance, depression, and all these stages. When they go through all these stages, they are affected," she says.

Ms Nalugo says people go through this because when they hear about prostate cancer, even though it is treatable, they lose hope, which, to psychologists, is understandable.

"That fear is what drives them to deny, it's what drives them to bargain, it's what drives them to anger and all these stages," she says.

Ms Nalugo says when such patients visit the health facility, both the medical doctors and psychologists not only prepare them for treatment, but also look at the mental aspect and ensure

The need for screening.

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Reaction after diagnosis.

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that they are fully prepared for recovery, both physically and mentally.

"It's also them being prepared psychologically for the psychological consequences of what they're going to undergo, that's why we're saying, because it has a psychological perspective to it, the emotional support comes in handy," she says.

The clinical psychologist says research has shown that sometimes the depression and the anxiety that is experienced during moments of diagnosis and moments of treatment worsen symptoms of prostate cancer.

"So when we provide emotional support, we are hoping to combat this. We're hoping to protect people from getting to a point where they'll be depressed. So if you come to a hospital and you have family with you, you have other men standing with you, other men who have gone through treatment and they have gotten better, other men who know, say the medical doctors, they have the knowledge, they have the experience and they are standing with you, it gives people the confidence to move forward and it really does help," Ms Nalugo says.

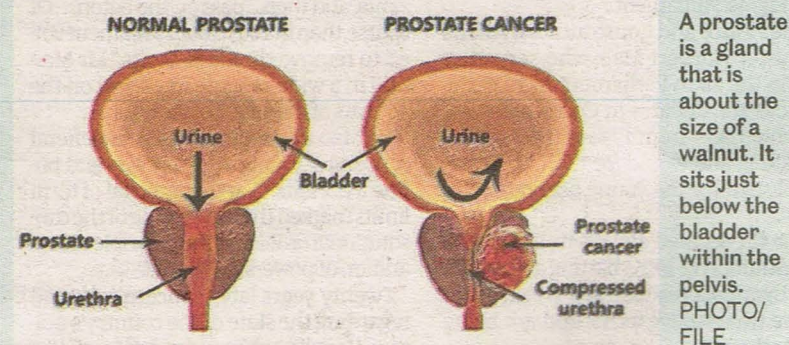
She advises that those who have been diagnosed with prostate cancer should not isolate themselves, but stay with their friends, relatives, and those who have experienced it so that they can learn from them.

"So I would say, do ask someone to support you, do not try to deal with it alone, do not try to isolate yourself because you don't want to burden other people, you don't want to seem weak because you're dealing with this, because it doesn't want to make you weak. It does not make you weak; it does not make you less of a man," Ms Nalugo says.

She adds: "Asking for help actually shows strength and is a sign of strength. So let's ask for help and let's try to embody that. Let's bring in other people to walk the journey with us. Let's not try to isolate ourselves. Let's talk about it."

PROSTATE CANCER PREVENTION TIPS

- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet to maintain a healthy weight.
- Avoid fat from dairy products and red and processed meats.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened drinks and highly processed food.
- Limit calcium intake to 1,200 milligrams per day.
- Eat more healthy fats from fatty fish and olive oil.
- Get additional nutrients from tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, soy-based foods, and green tea.
- Don't smoke and avoid heavy use of alcohol.
- Avoid overdosing on multivitamins.



A prostate is a gland that is about the size of a walnut. It sits just below the bladder within the pelvis. PHOTO/FILE

- Work to control blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels
- Keep stress levels low.
- Avoid vitamin E supplements and folic acid supplements.