



ALIVE!

PROSTATE CANCER CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS

IT'S NIGHTTIME. YOU ARE driving a country road when a deer leaps onto the pavement in front of you, stops in the middle of the road, seemingly looks straight at you and freezes. If the deer kept his eyes focused on the direction he was originally headed he would have had a good chance of bounding away to safety, but it's as if looking into the headlights Tased him. Why does that happen?!

The eyes of the deer were designed to be able to see at night. Their pupils are elliptical and can dilate to cover the entire width of the eye to take in more light. Their lens is larger than ours, again giving it better night vision. In addition, they have a reflector behind the retina that reflects light within the eye. David C. Yancy, a deer biologist with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resource, explains that when a deer's eyes are fully dilated to capture as much light as possible, the intense headlight beam of a car literally blinds them, the deer cannot see at all. They freeze until their eyes adjust. "They don't know what to do, so they do nothing."¹

We are familiar enough with this reality that we often hear the saying, "like a deer caught in headlights" as a description of human experience. A mental state of anxiety, fear, panic,

surprise and/or confusion, can take a person off guard as when faced with a test, a disaster or emergency, the diagnosis of cancer or disease to oneself or a loved one. One can be left stunned, dazed, unable, or not knowing how to move forward. When it comes to failing health or the realization that one's life is in jeopardy, freezing, whether in disbelief, fear, or uncertainty, is a natural response. When not prepared for such devastating reality, we can become temporarily blinded.

Reaching out to others helps us move forward and can be lifesaving. Health care professionals can help one adjust to and understand what is coming at them by educating, providing options of care, and coming alongside them to soften the blow. Whatever is oncoming must be met or dodged if possible. A diagnosis of prostate cancer can leave one feeling like a deer, standing in the middle of the road unable to see what is coming at them except for the intense glare. Where did the cancer come from, how big it is, how fast it is coming, which direction is it swerving, and how to get out of its way are unknowns. Knowledge can shed light on the oncoming danger, relieving the intensity of the blinding brightness.

Prostate cancer is the second most common type of cancer worldwide, second to lung cancer. It often impacts a man while still in the prime of his life, robbing him of his virility, urinary continence, and peace of mind. Whatever treatment options chosen, let the light of what I am about to share with you shine on the locomotive that is taking men by storm.

There is increasing evidence that diet and lifestyle play a crucial role in prostate cancer biology and growth of tumors.

Dr. Dean Ornish, who has conducted research on this subject, believes that consuming a plant-based diet and changing lifestyle can slow, stop, or reverse early stage prostate cancer. Men who had low risk of prostate cancer participated in an intensive nutrition and lifestyle intervention while undergoing careful surveillance for tumor progression. The intervention consisted of a low-fat, plant-based diet, exercise, stress management, and group support. Needle biopsies tumors were taken prior to and after the nutrition and lifestyle intervention. The researchers were examining changes in prostate gene expression. They found that in just three months, gene expression changed. Genes that are protective were up-regulated by lifestyle, whereas genes known to cause prostate and breast cancer were down-regulated.

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As a result of similar lifestyle changes, 93 men experienced a decreased PSA level and inhibition of prostate cancer cell growth, which was directly associated with the degree of change in diet and lifestyle after a 12 month period. Twelve months on a plant-based diet could reverse progression of prostate cancer. In another study involving 1,560 men with non-metastatic prostate cancer, the researchers found that men who ate the most cruciferous vegetables had a statistically significant (59%) decreased risk of prostate cancer progression compared to men consuming the least amount.

The benefits apparently come from eating more plants and less animal protein and fat. "Increased prostate cancer risk appears to be associated with saturated fat from animal sources, milk and other dairy products, and meat (particularly red and processed meat), whereas intake of whole-grain cereals, foods such as tomatoes that contain lycopene, plant foods containing phytoestrogens, vegetables, and fatty fish (with beneficial fatty acids) appear potentially protective.

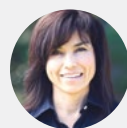
Unfortunately, this predominantly vegetable-based diet is atypical for American men most at risk for prostate cancer (> age 65 years) and supporting them in making such a change presents several challenges: Only 28% of prostate cancer survivors adhere to the American Cancer Society recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day."² Although a number of trials have studied the effect of minor dietary changes, such as nutritional supplements to reduce prostate cancer risk, the evidence strongly suggests that it is an overall dietary change that is most protective.

A separate group of researchers examined the association between consumption of processed and unprocessed meat, fish, poultry, and eggs with prostate cancer recurrence and progression in 1,294 men who had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. While these researchers did not observe an increased association with red meat, fish, and skinless poultry, there was a twofold increase in risk with a greater consumption of eggs and poultry with the skin.

I have lived for many years where deer signs are set up alongside the road warning the driver of possible danger, of what might be on the road ahead. They've help me drive cautiously and be more alert. Rather than a thorough assessment of prostate cancer, its risk factors, treatments, or cure, let this article be a deer sign, providing perspective as to what is too often looming in the shadows. While many stop with what modern medicine has to offer, my encouragement is to allow the benefits of plant-based eating and changes in activity, stress, and social dynamics, help you get to the other side safely. 🦌

1. C. Clairborne Ray, "The Twilight Zone," *The New York Times*, 11/29/10, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/science/30qna.html?_r=0.

2. James Carmody et al., "A Novel Measure of Dietary Change in a Prostate Cancer Dietary Program Incorporating Mindfulness Training," *National Center for Biotechnology Information*, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3483420>.



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