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## Studies link vasectomy with prostate cancer

CHICAGO (Reuter) – Two studies involving more than 73,000 American men have found a possible link between prostate cancer and vasectomies, researchers said Tuesday. But they were unable to account for the link.

Experts urged men with vasectomies not to panic and seek reversals of the surgical procedure, suggesting that they undergo routine blood and rectal exams instead to screen for prostate malignancy.

Men over age 50 – who are at increased prostate cancer risk anyway – and those who were sterilized more than 20 years ago were particularly advised to have a prostate checkup.

The two studies, published in this week's *Journal of the American Medical Association*, were headed up by Edward Giovannucci of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

One study found "vasectomy was associ-

ated with an overall 66-per-cent elevated risk of prostate cancer. Men who had their vasectomy more than two decades (ago) had an 85-per-cent elevated risk."

The study supports but "cannot prove a causal association" between vasectomy and cancer, the report said.

The second study also found a higher risk among sterilized men and said the risk increased over time.

Michael Policar of the U.S. Planned Parenthood Federation said very little research has been done to explain what happens to the walnut-sized prostate gland after a vasectomy, when sperm no longer passes through it to be mixed with ejaculatory fluid.

"So we're a little hesitant about accepting the finding in this study because there's not a mechanism to explain what that link would be," he said.

Policar said two previous studies found no

link between vasectomies and prostate cancer.

Giovannucci said in his studies that link is "undefined" but "the diminished secretory capacity of the prostate gland following vasectomy and possible suppression of tumour immunity following vasectomy" need to be explored.

Logan Holtgrewe, president of the American Urological Association, said in a statement issued by the group: "I think it's important to emphasize that men who have had a vasectomy should not panic and should not rush out to reverse the procedure."

Stuart Howards, head of a vasectomy-prostate task force for the urological group, said the association recommends men who had a vasectomy more than 20 years ago, or when they were more than 40 years old, should have an annual digital rectal exam and a blood test, which picks up changes in the gland.

**REFERENCES:** Giovannucci, E., Ascherio, A., Rimm, E.B., Colditz, G.A., Stampfer, M.J. and W.C. Willett: A prospective cohort study of vasectomy and prostate cancer in U.S. Men. *JAMA* **269**(#7): 73-877 (1993).

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