

Flax and Prostate Cancer

By Esther Hylden RN

Do you know anyone who has been touched by Prostate Cancer? Mark's brother and uncle have been battling prostate cancer this past year. His brother, Dan, is now cancer free, his Uncle Gordon is still in the battle.

Last summer, Mark and I visited our son in Durham, North Carolina. During that visit, we were privileged to be able to spend some time with Dr. Boyd Switzer. Dr. Switzer is the lead researcher of the study entitled, Flaxseed Intake, Urinary of Seminal Lignan Levels and Prostate Cancer Growth. I asked Dr. Switzer why he decided to study the effects of flax on prostate cancer. He stated that his original interest was the effects of food components on prostate cancer. However, by twist of fate, his colleague was treating a male patient who had been seen by an urologist, and was found to be positive for prostate cancer. Surgery was not an option for this patient, so Dr. Switzer's colleague, Wendy Demark-Wahnefried, PhD, RD, decided to encourage her patient to take 2 to 3 tablespoons of flaxseed daily. Flaxseed is a phyto-estrogen, and high in Omega 3's and lignans, Wendy felt that this combination of benefits would be helpful to her patient. Her patient agreed to take flaxseed daily. Six months later, Wendy's patient returned to the clinic for additional testing...the pathologist called Wendy and asked, "What are you doing with this patient? His samples are all clear!" Wendy shared this remarkable event with Dr. Switzer, and they knew that they needed to learn more about the effect of Flaxseed intake on prostate cancer growth.

Many years and much research has passed since that exciting first "ah-ha" moment. Duke University funded their initial pilot study, and the National Cancer Institute supported their human study. They conducted a Phase 11 randomized study on 161 men scheduled for prostatectomy. The men were randomly assigned for one of four dietary treatments. The group assigned to consume flaxseed, had a daily intake of 30 grams of ground flax. After 30-31 days, the prostate cancer proliferation index of men supplemented with flaxseed was significantly reduced to roughly 50% of that observed in men consuming regular or low fat diets. Dr. Switzer notes that how the various components of flaxseed decrease prostate growth cannot yet be explained, however he believes that it is the synergy of flaxseed's components; antioxidants, phytoestrogens, omega 3's, and lignans that is the key to the remarkable response noted. He also noted that flaxseed has more impact on the proliferation of prostate cancer, if it is utilized at an early stage. Dr. Switzer stated that additional study is required.

Mark and I enjoyed our visit with Dr. Switzer, and wish him much success with his future research.

Source:

Flaxseed Intake, Urinary or Seminal Lignan Levels and Prostate Cancer Growth

Boyd r. Switzer, PhD, Robin Vollmer, MD, Stephen George, PhD, John Madden, MD, PhD, Denise Snyder, MS, RD, Mack T. Ruffin, IV, MD, MPH, Vera Hars, MS and Wendy Demark-Wahnefried, PhD, RD (USA)