

# Too young to be concerned about Prostate Cancer? Think again.

by Sue Burgin

**D**anny Bedingfield certainly wasn't thinking about it when he received his diagnosis at age 37.

But a suggestion from his mum that he should get a test following the death of his father at 71 with prostate cancer, almost certainly saved his life.

Prostate cancer is not just an old man's problem, and yes, it's embarrassing to talk about such issues, but Danny says a life with your grandchildren may depend on it.

"I admit I returned home after Dad's funeral and thought I didn't need to get tested, but Mum's voice was stuck in my head, so I did it. A callback following the initial test and a biopsy resulted in a diagnosis of low-grade prostate cancer at age 37."

He says he went on to have a robotic prostatectomy, a keyhole procedure that carries less risk of harming nerves around the prostate, and is now cancer-free.

As a result of his experience, Danny began working with the Prostate Cancer Foundation of New Zealand and has just been re-elected President for a second three-year term.

## Ignorance and fear lead to late diagnosis

Danny Bedingfield says he despairs of hearing people say it's an old man's disease.

"They're not all in their 70s and 80s, they're getting a lot younger."

He says people also worry treatment can lead to nerve damage causing incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

"This is quite a private area for a male, especially in some cultures, so it's not talked about openly.

And then there's the dreaded DRE, digital rectal examination, that deters many men from talking to their GP when they suspect something is not right."

The good news is, according to Danny, the PSA blood test is available to everyone and it's a much better option, especially if done regularly, every one or two years after the age of 50. He says men with a family history of prostate cancer should start testing at 40.

## Pleas for screening programme ignored

There is currently no screening programme for prostate cancer.

Danny Bedingfield says they've been talking to the last government, and now the new government, about funding a four-year pilot screening programme similar to the breast cancer and bowel screening programmes, but without success.



Prostate Cancer Foundation President, Danny Bedingfield (above and right - photos supplied)

"We applaud the government extending the breast screening programme to 74. Everyone acknowledges the sooner cancer is detected, the better the outcomes.

When it comes to minimising the risk, Danny says regular testing is the most effective option, but a healthy lifestyle with less red meat and alcohol, no smoking, and more exercise are always recommended.

Meanwhile, Danny says we have good diagnostic pathways and must encourage our men to be proactive and get tested.

Fathers, brothers, sisters, mothers, and partners, talk to your men about prostate cancer.

Encourage them to talk to their GPs and ask for a PSA test regularly.

If there's a history of prostate cancer in the family, don't hide it. Other males in the family need to know they're more likely than others to be affected.

"At the end of the day, all we have is our health and prostate cancer is totally fixable if caught early," Danny says.



## Don't ignore the signs

- More frequent urinating – especially at night.
- Passing blood in urine.
- Lower back pain.

## The numbers are growing

There are around 4,000 new cases being diagnosed every year and that number is steadily growing, according to the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

Danny Bedingfield says one in eight men will get a prostate diagnosis, and two men a day will die from it.

"Those statistics make it the most common and costly diagnosed male cancer."

He says the statistics tell a tale of under-reporting, unhelpful misconceptions and needless loss of lives.

"With around 700 men a year losing their lives to this cancer, it's time to start taking it seriously. That's more than breast cancer and double the road toll," he says.

"We have good diagnostic pathways, but with around 4000 diagnoses a year, it's obvious men aren't getting the early testing that could stop the cancer becoming life-threatening."