

The logo for 'BOB tales' features the text 'BOB' in a large, bold, dark blue sans-serif font, followed by 'tales' in a smaller, lowercase, dark blue sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a red balloon with a black outline and a black string. The background consists of several overlapping, curved, light blue and green lines that create a sense of movement and depth.

# BOB tales

Brotherhood of the Balloon Member Newsletter | **September 2025**

"Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore." – Andre Gide

Dear Members (a note from Deb Hickey):

As summer fades and the season shifts, September arrives with a renewed sense of purpose. It's not just back-to-school time or the start of fall—it's also Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, a powerful opportunity to honor the journeys, victories, and struggles of so many affected by this disease. It's a time to reflect, to share, and most importantly—to raise awareness about the critical importance of early detection, support, and innovation in prostate cancer care.

But beyond the blue ribbons and awareness campaigns lies a simple truth: too many men still don't talk about prostate cancer. Too many wait too long to get screened. Some don't even know what a PSA test is. I've even met *women* who were genuinely concerned they might get prostate cancer—so clearly, we still have some educating to do. This month isn't just about awareness—it's about changing the narrative.

One in eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime – one in six if you're African American. That's not just a statistic—it's your father, your brother, your best friend, your neighbor. And yet, when caught early, prostate cancer is highly treatable. That's why this month, we're asking you to do one small thing that could make a big difference: *share something*. Tell someone your story. Talk about proton therapy and why you chose it. Forward an article. Forward our newsletter. Start a conversation. You never know whose life you might change.

Let's use this month to spread knowledge, support one another, and save lives—because awareness equals action, and action saves lives.

Inside this month's *BOB Tales*, we share the results of a major new trial showing that regular exercise doesn't just reduce cancer risk—it can also dramatically lower recurrence and improve survival. This builds on earlier findings linking physical activity to a reduced risk for at least 13 types of cancer.

We also explore the growing evidence connecting chronic inflammation with prostate cancer development—and what that might mean for prevention and treatment.

You'll learn about surprising new research on how urinary tract bacteria may fuel prostate cancer growth by producing hormone-like compounds, a discovery that could shift the way we think about hormone therapy.

In another noteworthy study, researchers found that rectal spacers—long used to protect the rectum during radiation—might also help reduce the risk of erectile dysfunction.

And in our last article in our *News Report* section, we revisit the age-old question: Does vasectomy increase prostate cancer risk? New expert insights help clarify the facts and debunk the myths.

In our *Flashback* section this month, we're bringing back a 2012 article on a topic that remains front and center in prostate cancer care: the connection between body weight and cancer severity. The findings are eye-opening—and a powerful reminder of how lifestyle choices can directly impact outcomes.

This month's *Member Spotlight* takes us high above the ground—and deep into one man's unforgettable path to healing. Rudi Höfer has spent decades floating above the castles and valleys of southern Germany as a hot air balloon pilot. But in 2009, his world shifted when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer just before Christmas. What followed was a journey that would take him across the globe to Loma Linda, CA, where he found not only proton therapy—but a second chance at life.

In our general *Health* section, we highlight 10 everyday habits that may be quietly harming your kidneys—and how small changes can make a big impact. We also share five science-backed ways to protect your heart and lower your risk of heart disease—starting today. And for the guys reaching for cologne or deodorant: new research reveals some products may lower testosterone levels. We break down what to avoid and safer options to consider.

As always, we welcome any suggestions you have for making the *BOB Tales* more valuable to members. Please send your feedback to [DHickey@protonbob.com](mailto:DHickey@protonbob.com).

Deb Hickey



- [GExercise Dramatically Reduces Cancer Risk— and Improves Survival](#)
- [The Link Between Chronic Inflammation and Prostate Cancer](#)
- [Hidden Hormones: How Urinary Tract Bacteria May Fuel Prostate Cancer Growth](#)
- [Unexpected Bonus: Rectal Spacers May Also Help Preserve Sexual Function](#)
- [Vasectomy and Prostate Cancer: What's the Real Connection?](#)
- [Flashback: New Study Links Body Size to Prostate Cancer Severity](#)
- [10 Common Habits That May Harm Your Kidneys](#)
- [Heart Disease Prevention: 5 Things to Do Starting Now](#)
- [Do Cologne and Deodorant Lower Testosterone?](#)



# Exercise Dramatically Reduces Cancer Risk and Improves Survival

We've long known that exercise can lower cancer risk. A major international study shows it may also reduce recurrence and improve survival in people who've already had cancer.

## The Challenge Trial

Published recently in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the [CHALLENGE trial](#) followed 889 colon cancer survivors from six countries over several years.

Participants were randomized into two groups:

### The Exercise group:

- Received a structured, personalized exercise plan
- Met regularly with physical activity coaches
- Used pedometers to track activity
- Set goals and got behavioral support for three years

### The Control Group

- Received health education only, with printed educational materials about healthy living, such as:
  - General info on cancer survivorship
  - Benefits of exercise
  - Healthful eating advice
- Received no in-person training, no follow-up coaching, no structured exercise
- Were not discouraged from exercising, but received no plan, coaching/follow-up



[Breakthrough Technology May Supercharge FLASH Proton Therapy](#)

Researchers have developed a new magnet system that allows proton therapy machines to switch beam energies almost instantly. This could speed up treatment, improve precision, and make FLASH therapy even more effective and widely accessible. While still in the early stages, the technology shows great promise.

[Scientists Use Fat Cells to Starve Cancer](#)

Researchers have engineered fat cells that burn so much energy they starve nearby cancer cells. In mice, they slowed or stopped breast, prostate, and pancreatic tumors—even from a distance. More research is coming.



### Why This Matters

Both groups knew exercise was good. But only the exercise group got help to do it—and the results were striking:

- The exercise group had a 28% lower risk of cancer recurrence
- They also had a 37% lower risk of death

These outcomes were measured over three years, tracking actual recurrence and survival rates—not just activity levels or self-reports.

## The Big Picture

This trial builds on earlier findings—especially a [2016 analysis](#) of 1.44 million people published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*. This study showed regular physical activity is linked to lower risks for at least 13 types of cancer, including:

- Breast
- Liver
- Lung
- Kidney
- Endometrial
- Colon
- Rectal
- Bladder

Newer research suggests that even very short bursts of movement—like climbing stairs, brisk walking, or even carrying groceries—may reduce cancer risk by up to 18% in people who otherwise don't get regular exercise.

## What's Going On Inside the Body?

Scientists believe exercise helps prevent cancer through several key biological processes:

- **Hormonal regulation:** Physical activity helps control insulin and estrogen—hormones linked to tumor growth.

### [Frequent Ejaculation Linked to Lower Prostate Cancer Risk](#)

New research suggests that regular ejaculation may help reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Men reporting 21 or more ejaculations per month had a 20% lower risk, according to long-term data.

### [Diabetes Drug Shows Promise Against Prostate Cancer](#)

A common Type 2 diabetes drug, pioglitazone, may help slow the growth of prostate cancer. Researchers found it targets a protein (PPAR $\gamma$ ) linked to tumor growth, and early lab and patient data are promising.

### [Obesity-Linked Cancer Deaths Tripled in Past 20 Years](#)

Obesity-related cancers account for 40% of new U.S. cases, with deaths tripling since 1999 and hitting certain groups harder—including older adults, women, and rural and Black communities, highlighting obesity as a major cancer risk.

- **Lower inflammation:** Chronic inflammation contributes to cancer; exercise lowers inflammatory markers.
- **Stronger immune response:** Movement improves immune surveillance, helping the body find and eliminate abnormal cells.
- **Improved gut/metabolic health:** Regular activity improves digestion and metabolic function—both tied to cancer risk.
- **Enhanced DNA repair:** Some evidence suggests exercise may enhance the body's ability to fix damaged DNA before mutations occur.



## Every Step Counts!

You don't need a gym membership. Just *move* more, however you can. Experts recommend:

- **2½ to 5 hours per week of moderate activity**
- **1¼ to 2½ hours per week of vigorous activity**

Even just a few minutes a day of any movement—like stretching, gardening, or walking around the house—adds up. Small, consistent efforts matter, and science shows they can help save lives.

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# The Link Between Chronic Inflammation and Prostate Cancer

[New research](#) is shedding light on how chronic inflammation in the prostate may trigger and fuel cancer growth. While inflammation is part of the body's healing process, when it lingers—due to infections, injury, or other irritants—it can create an environment that encourages abnormal cell growth and genetic mutations.

Scientists are identifying specific inflammatory pathways and molecules involved in this process, opening the door to potential new strategies for prevention, early detection, and treatment.

This growing evidence highlights the importance of managing inflammation—not just through appropriate medical care, but also with healthful lifestyle choices like regular exercise, a balanced diet, stress management, and avoiding smoking. Reducing chronic inflammation could be key to slowing—or even stopping—prostate cancer in its tracks.

Ongoing research continues to explore how targeting inflammation could lead to better treatments and improved outcomes for men with prostate cancer.

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## Hidden Hormones: How Urinary Tract Bacteria May Fuel Prostate Cancer Growth

A [groundbreaking study](#) from the University of Illinois has revealed a surprising link between urinary tract bacteria and prostate cancer progression. Researchers found that certain bacteria can transform corticosteroids—often used in treatments like prednisone—into hormones called androgens that encourage prostate cancer cell growth. This challenges previous ideas about hormone therapy and opens new doors for treatment.

The study was led by Dr. Jason Ridlon, a Professor of Microbiology and Biochemistry, and Dr. Joseph Irudayaraj, a Professor of Bioengineering, both at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. They discovered that specific bacteria, including one called *propionimicrobium lymphophilum* (linked to prostate cancer), can produce these hormone-like compounds, potentially fueling tumor growth.

This research highlights the importance of considering the body's microbiome in cancer treatment and suggests that targeting bacterial hormone production could lead to better therapies. As scientists explore the complex relationship between bacteria and cancer, this study marks an important step toward understanding and potentially controlling prostate cancer progression.



# Unexpected Bonus: Rectal Spacers May Help with ED

Rectal spacers have long been used to shield the rectum from radiation damage during prostate cancer treatment—but new research suggests their benefits may extend beyond bowel protection.

In a [recent study](#) led by Dr. Ryan Hankins, a urologist at MedStar Georgetown, researchers analyzed Medicare data from more than 247,000 men treated with radiation between 2015 and 2022. Instead of tracking individual patients, they examined data at the county level, comparing regions where rectal spacers were used more frequently with those where they were used less.

The result: counties with higher spacer use had lower rates of erectile dysfunction (ED) diagnoses after treatment. While the findings don't prove that spacers directly reduce the risk of ED, the correlation points to a potentially broader protective effect—one that warrants further study.

If confirmed, this could expand the role of rectal spacers in prostate cancer care—supporting not just rectal health, but sexual function as well.

- **BOB Comment:** The study linked higher rectal spacer use to lower ED rates at the county level, but because it didn't track individual patients, it can't prove causation. While the results are promising, future studies with more detailed patient data are needed to confirm the findings.

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## Vasectomy and Prostate Cancer: What's the Real Connection?

Many men worry that having a vasectomy could increase their risk of prostate cancer. After all, conflicting headlines and [early studies](#) have sown doubt and confusion. But the latest expert insights from MD Anderson Cancer Center reveal a [more reassuring story](#). While men who have had vasectomies sometimes show higher rates of prostate cancer



diagnosis, this is most likely because they tend to receive more regular PSA screening—not because the procedure itself raises cancer risk.

What's often overlooked is the role of “screening bias,” where more frequent testing leads to more diagnoses. It's important to separate this from an actual cause-and-effect relationship. Vasectomy itself is generally safe and has minimal side effects, so men can weigh the true risks and benefits when considering the procedure.



## flashback

We've been publishing *BOB Tales* for nearly 25 years, sharing thousands of articles—many of which our newer members haven't seen, and longtime members may have forgotten or would appreciate revisiting. That's why we regularly reprint articles from past issues that we believe are still relevant and carry an important message. The following article appeared in our August 2012 issue.

# New Study Links Body Size to Prostate Cancer Severity



[Research](#) from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) underscores the significant impact of body weight on prostate cancer severity. Researchers analyzed data from 119 men with early-stage prostate cancer who were awaiting prostatectomy and found a strong association between increased body mass index (BMI) and tumor aggressiveness.

Overweight men were three times more likely—and obese men six times more likely—to have larger, more aggressive tumors with a higher risk of recurrence after surgery compared to men of healthy weight.

Dr. Vincent Freeman, lead investigator and UIC researcher, emphasized that BMI—a measure of body weight relative to height—plays a critical role in tumor development and progression. The study adds to growing evidence that maintaining a healthy weight can not only reduce the risk of developing prostate cancer, but may also slow its progression and improve long-term outcomes.

These findings underscore the importance of weight management as part of prostate cancer care and prevention. Men diagnosed with prostate cancer are encouraged to speak with their healthcare providers about lifestyle changes that could support better treatment results and reduce recurrence risk.



## spotlight on members

# Two Balloons, One Journey: Healing from the Inside Out

Rudi Höfer has spent much of his life floating above the earth—quietly drifting over the castles, forests, and valleys of southern Germany in a hot air balloon. Based in the town of Michelbach, Rudi has been a balloon pilot since 1990, organizing flights throughout the region and leading festivals that draw international pilots and spectators alike. In 1993, he became the first German pilot to fly a hot air balloon over the Great Wall of China.

Today, at 79, Rudi's still flying—and teaching others to fly—grateful each time the balloon lifts off, and especially thankful for the journey that brought him to Loma Linda, CA more than a decade ago.

In December 2009, just days before Christmas, Rudi received devastating news: he had prostate cancer. His PSA had jumped from 9 to 14, and a biopsy confirmed the diagnosis. He kept the news from his wife through the holidays, unable to sleep and unsure what his future would hold.



*Ballonfestival Tannheimer Tal — One of the most stunning hot air balloon festivals in the Alps, held each year in Austria's beautiful Tannheim Valley. Rudi Höfer, a seasoned balloon pilot from Germany, helps organize this magical event that draws balloonists and spectators from around the world.*

In the weeks that followed, Rudi visited several doctors and quickly leaned toward surgery—his instinct was to “cut the cancer out as fast as possible.” But then a friend sent him a blog written by another German man who’d traveled to the U.S. for proton therapy at Loma Linda University Cancer Center in California. That changed everything.

“I became really curious about this treatment called proton therapy,” Rudi said. “There were so many options out there, but this one stood out—it was easy on the body and came with fewer scary side effects.” He began researching, making calls, and even reached out to a German cancer support hotline, where he connected with a man who was undergoing treatment at Loma Linda at that very moment. “He told me, ‘It’s been the best holiday of my life.’ He explained everything to me—the hospital, the doctors and other staff, the comraderie with patients, even the really tasty, yet healthful, vegan food they had in the cafeteria.”





Rudi shared his interest in proton therapy with his local urologist. The response was shocking. “He fired me,” Rudi said. “He told me, ‘If you want to go to America for this treatment, find another doctor.’”

Determined, Rudi searched for the German doctor mentioned in the blog—Dr. Fleischmann in Heidelberg—but quickly discovered there wasn’t just one. “There were so many Dr. Fleischmanns, I thought half of Germany must be named that,” he joked. He called more than a dozen listings before finally reaching the right one. A few days later, he met with “the real Dr. Fleischmann” in person, and together they began the process of submitting his medical records to LLUCC.

Rudi began his proton treatment in March 2011. At his first patient gathering—known simply as “The Wednesday Night Meeting,” a beloved LLUCC tradition featuring presentations, stories, poems, songs, and food—he stood to introduce himself:

**“Rudi Höfer from Germany. Balloon pilot.”**

The room erupted in laughter. “The connection between my job title and LLUCC’s rectal balloon was not lost on anyone,” Rudi said. “It made for the perfect icebreaker.”

He settled into life at LLUCC quickly, feeling right at home among fellow patients and staff. “The sense of community was incredible,” Rudi said. “I made friends almost immediately.” Soon, he became known not just as the balloon pilot from Germany, but as “the tomato man.” At patient-organized potlucks—regular gatherings filled with food, laughter, and shared stories—Rudi always brought his signature dish: fresh tomato and mozzarella, “beautifully arranged on large platters.”

“That dish became my thing,” Rudi said. “And the tomato name stuck.”

Fourteen years later, Rudi's PSA remains at 0.2, and he feels fantastic. He's back to doing what he loves most: piloting hot air balloons, training new pilots, and leading balloon festivals throughout Europe. His company, [Ballonteam Schwäbisch Hall](#), organizes scenic flights over historic towns and vineyards—including the chance to land near Germany's iconic Neuschwanstein Castle if the winds cooperate.

He also works closely with the tourism office in Austria's Tannheim Valley, co-hosting one of the region's most breathtaking winter balloon festivals. You can explore the event and learn more at the [Tannheimer Tal Balloon Festival website](#).

**If you'd like to see what it's like to soar with Rudi, [this short video](#) offers a stunning aerial glimpse of a balloon ride high above the snow-covered Alps.**

Rudi often speaks with newly diagnosed men, encouraging them to explore proton therapy and learn from others who've been through it. "I tell all men about proton therapy and my experience at LLUCC," he says. "But not everyone wants to hear it." Sadly, that included one of his closest friends, who was convinced at first, but ultimately chose traditional treatments after speaking with his local doctor. He later passed away.

Rudi says he hopes to return to LLUCC someday to share his story at a Wednesday night meeting. But ballooning keeps him busy, and each year he ends up postponing the trip. "Maybe next year," he says, smiling. "Unless I'm flying."



making a difference by giving back

## Progress, Promise, and Pediatric Care Transforming Lives

About 18 months ago, Loma Linda University Health launched the *Stronger Together* campaign—an ambitious effort to raise \$300 million for cancer research, innovative treatments, pediatric care, and more. More recently, the goal has grown to \$310 million, reflecting the campaign's momentum and the expanding reach of its impact.

To truly understand the heart and hope behind this campaign, we invite you to [watch this impactful video](#) that shares the stories and vision fueling *Stronger Together*.



*Dr. Richard Hart, President of Loma Linda University Health, announces the official launch of the “Stronger Together” campaign during the community launch event on February 28, 2024, at the Loma Linda University Church.*

The campaign’s mission is clear: to accelerate the development of new treatments, expand the training of compassionate healthcare professionals, and improve access to critical healthcare services. It’s a call to action—an opportunity for all of us to help shape a future where more lives are saved, more families are whole, and more hope is restored.

Since the campaign began, we’ve shared exciting updates in the *BOB Tales* on emerging therapies like theranostics, CAR-T, and boron neutron capture therapy—all offering new hope for complex or advanced cancers.

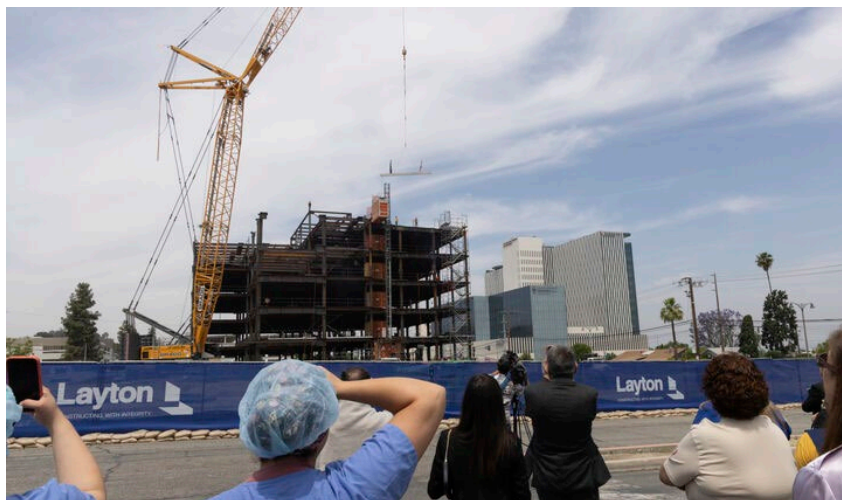
Recently, LLUH shared a significant update on the campaign: **More than \$154 million has been raised toward the campaign’s \$310 million goal.** That’s a major testament to the power of collective giving!

## Spotlight on Progress: Children’s Hospital Specialty Clinics Building

As part of *Stronger Together*, LLU Children’s Hospital recently held a topping-off ceremony for its new Specialty Clinics building. This five-story, 105,000-square-foot facility is set to transform pediatric care in the Inland Empire when it opens next year.

Just six months after breaking ground, hospital leadership, architects, construction teams, and community supporters gathered as the final steel beam was placed—a tradition symbolizing growth, resilience, and hope.

The new facility will bring together over 20 pediatric specialties—including Cardiology, Neurology, Gastroenterology, Pediatric Surgery, and more—currently scattered across multiple locations. The goal: to provide coordinated, accessible care for the 75,000+ young patients expected annually.



*Loma Linda University Children's Hospital celebrated a milestone with a "topping off" ceremony on May 28 for its new Specialty Clinics building, a five-story, 105,000-square-foot facility set to transform pediatric care in the region. The building is scheduled to open next year.*

The work isn't done. With nearly half the goal still to reach and lifesaving advancements under way, your support remains vital. Whether through annual giving, estate planning, or spreading the word, every act of generosity drives discovery, trains tomorrow's healers, and brings hope to families facing cancer and other serious illnesses.

Together, we truly are stronger.

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## Giving Options

- **Online:** [Donate here.](#) From the pull-down menu, choose where you'd like to direct your gift — 1) Cancer Center Vision (the *Stronger Together* campaign; 2) Proton Research through the *James M. Slater Chair*; 3) Proton Research through the *Robert J. Marckini Chair*; or 4) Other (specify any area you'd like your gift directed)
- **By Check:** Make your check out to "LLUCC." Specify where you'd like to direct your gift in the memo line — 1) Cancer Center Vision, 2) *Slater Chair*, 3) *Marckini Chair*, or 4) write "unrestricted" so LLUH can use it where it's needed most. Mail to: LLUH, Office of Philanthropy P.O. Box 2000, Loma Linda, CA 92354.
- **By Phone:** Call Regina Joseph at 909-558-5010.





# 10 Common Habits That May Harm Your Kidneys

Your kidneys play a vital role in keeping your body healthy by filtering waste and balancing fluids. But everyday habits—some that seem harmless—can quietly damage these essential organs over time. The National Kidney Foundation [highlights 10 common behaviors](#) that may put your kidney health at risk. Understanding and adjusting these habits can help protect your kidneys and support overall wellbeing.

1. **Overusing Painkillers:** Frequent use of NSAIDs and analgesics can damage kidneys, especially if kidney disease is already present. Stick to recommended doses.
2. **Eating Too Much Salt:** High sodium diets raise blood pressure and harm kidneys. Use herbs and spices instead of salt.
3. **Eating Processed Foods:** Processed foods contain unhealthful additives, sugar, fats, and sodium, increasing kidney disease risk by 24%. Choose whole foods like fruits and vegetables.
4. **Not Drinking Enough Water:** Proper hydration helps kidneys flush out waste and prevents kidney stones and infections. Fluid intake may need adjusting in advanced kidney disease.
5. **Not Getting Enough Sleep:** Kidney function is regulated by the sleep-wake cycle. Lack of sleep negatively affects kidney health.
6. **Eating Too Much Meat (Protein):** While protein is vital, excessive animal protein can burden kidneys, especially in those with kidney disease.
7. **Eating Too Much Sugar:** Sugar contributes to obesity, which increases risk for high blood pressure and diabetes, the top causes of kidney disease.
8. **Smoking:** Smoking increases the chance of protein in urine, a sign of kidney damage.

9. **Drinking Too Much Alcohol:** Heavy drinking disrupts kidney function, causes dehydration, raises blood pressure, and strains the liver and kidneys.
10. **Not Exercising:** Regular physical activity supports healthy weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Exercise cuts mortality risk by about 50% in people with advanced kidney disease.

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## Heart Disease Prevention: 5 Things to Do Starting Now

Did you know heart disease has been the leading cause of death in the U.S. for 100 years—yet more than half of Americans don't realize it? The good news is, there are powerful steps you can take right now to protect your heart and live healthier longer.

1. **Know your numbers:** Check your blood pressure—high levels often go unnoticed and raise serious risk.
2. **Move your body:** Regular exercise helps manage weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol—even a 30-minute daily walk helps.
3. **Eat smart:** Choose whole foods like fruits, veggies, whole grains, and lean proteins. Cut back on processed foods, salt, and added sugars.
4. **Quit smoking:** If you smoke, quitting is the single best thing you can do for your heart—and your overall health.
5. **Manage stress and sleep:** Chronic stress and poor sleep impact your heart health too. Find ways to relax and aim for 7-9 hours of sleep nightly.

Heart disease doesn't have to be a life sentence. With knowledge and smart choices, you can protect your heart and add meaningful years to your life.



# Do Cologne and Deodorant Lower Testosterone?

Many conventional colognes and deodorants contain chemicals that can disrupt hormone balance—especially testosterone. Ingredients like aluminum, parabens, phthalates, BPA, and triclosan can enter the bloodstream through the skin and act as endocrine disruptors, potentially lowering testosterone levels and contributing to issues like fatigue, low libido, and muscle loss.

[Studies](#) have linked phthalates and parabens specifically to changes in testosterone levels in men, underscoring the importance of reading labels and choosing safer products.

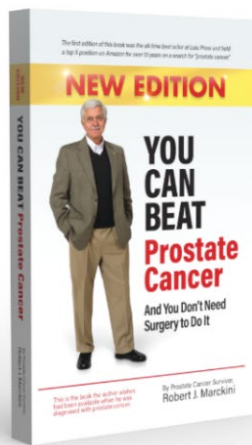
Antiperspirants may also interfere with the body’s natural detoxification and temperature regulation by blocking sweat.

Natural alternatives—such as essential oils, DIY fragrances, or store-bought natural deodorants—offer safer, hormone-friendly options.



the book

## You Can Beat Prostate Cancer: And You Don’t Need Surgery to Do It



As of this writing, Bob’s second edition is holding the No. 2 spot on Amazon—out of more than 7,000 books on a search for “prostate cancer.”

Together, both editions of Bob’s book have earned 814 reviews and an average rating of five stars. It’s clear the book continues to educate, empower, and guide men through one of life’s most critical health decisions, and its consistent top ranking reflects its value as a trusted resource.

## Real Words from Real Readers—Every Voice Matters



*The book did not mention my disease: My type of cancer was not mentioned in either edition of Mr. Marckini's book. Adenocarcinoma is not the only prostate cancer. I was not prepared. I spent the next six months reading medical papers on intraductal carcinoma with cribriform pattern.*

- **BOB Comment:** This subtype can be a form of adenocarcinoma. It isn't addressed because IDC-P is rare, often requiring a different diagnostic and treatment strategy. Bob's book is geared toward newly diagnosed men—most of whom have the most common form of adenocarcinoma. That said, we recognize the importance of acknowledging less common variants and appreciate thoughtful feedback like this. We'll consider including a mention of IDC-P in a future edition.

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## Did Bob's book help you? Your review matters.

When diagnosed with cancer, [89% turn to the internet](#) for answers—40% on the very same day. Many end up on Amazon, where reviews carry serious weight. If Bob's book helped you, please take a moment to [write a review](#). Your words could help someone else find clarity and hope. *Thank you.*



on the lighter side

## Last Month's Brain Teaser

**What can travel around the world while staying in the same spot?**

**Answer:** a postage stamp

**Winner:** Congratulations to Bob Gathany of Decatur, AL—winner of our July/August 2025 Brain Teaser!

Bob was treated with proton therapy for his prostate cancer at the Tennessee Oncology Proton Center in Franklin, TN.

“I have a family history of prostate cancer,” Bob told us. “My grandfather, father, two uncles, and a cousin all had it.” Because of that, Bob began getting annual PSA tests at age 40. In 2020, at age 68, his PSA began to rise. A biopsy revealed a Gleason score of 4+5=9, and Bob was diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer. “Even though the high Gleason score caught me off guard, I was grateful the cancer was found early—before it had a chance to spread beyond my prostate,” he said.

Not surprisingly, Bob’s urologist—a surgeon—recommended surgery. But Bob wasn’t the type to jump into the first recommendation without doing his homework. “I started researching online and found the Brotherhood of the Balloon website and then Bob Marckini’s book,” he said. “I chose proton therapy as my best treatment option because I thought it would be much easier on my body.”



*Bob Gathany prepares for one of 39 proton treatments.*

The nearest proton center was 85 miles away in Franklin, TN. “So, over an eight-week period, my wife Lou and I drove 170 miles round-trip each day for 39 treatments,” Bob said. “Even though it was a big commitment, that decision has turned out to be one of the best I’ve ever made.” It’s worth noting that all of this happened during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bob was told he could delay treatment if he wanted to—but he didn’t. “There was no way we were going to postpone. I just wanted it to be over,” he said.

Thankfully, Bob’s treatments were “quick and easy.” He felt the staff and technicians were friendly and knowledgeable. He was even able to continue working and remodeling his home during treatment. Bob also shared photos and details of his cancer journey on Facebook, allowing friends and family to follow along.



In addition to proton therapy, Bob underwent 18 months of ADT (hormone therapy), which brought some fatigue and hot flashes—but, as he noted, “nothing compared to the side effects experienced by friends who opted for surgery.”

It’s now been five years since Bob’s proton treatment. His PSA remains “very low,” and he reports no lingering side effects.



Bob Guthary, suspended midair and doing what he loves most

A lifelong photographer, Bob volunteers his time photographing high school sports for AL.com. “I not only inherited prostate cancer,” he said, “I inherited a family history of photography. My grandmother and her brother were photographers back in the early 1900s.” Bob has been behind a camera for most of his life—beginning with the college yearbook at Nyack College in 1972, then working in camera shops, and eventually opening a commercial photo studio and lab in 1980. His studio served businesses and industries throughout North Alabama.

In 2000, Bob began a second career as a staff photographer for *The Huntsville Times*, capturing news, concerts, features, and sports before retiring in 2019. Today, in addition to continuing his sports photography, Bob also drives for the local food bank and volunteers with PAR—Prepare and Respond—a disaster response team, photographing their deployments to clear storm damage after tornadoes, hurricanes and flooding throughout the Southeast..

“I’m so grateful I chose proton therapy over surgery,” Bob said. “I have no regrets, and I always tell others to be diligent about getting their annual PSA tests and to research all treatment options. Don’t just take your doctor’s first recommendation.”

Bob also told us he’s glad to receive another copy of *You Can Beat Prostate Cancer*—he keeps giving his copies away to friends and neighbors who’ve been diagnosed.

You can [visit Bob’s website](#) to see his incredible photography, from portraits of Willie Nelson live in concert to roaring house fires and car wrecks, to stunning images of churches, Icelandic landscapes, and Italian architecture. He even features vintage family photos from generations past.

# New Brain Teaser

The person who makes it has no need of it. The person who buys it doesn't use it. The person who uses it doesn't know it.

Send your answer to [DHickey@protonbob.com](mailto:DHickey@protonbob.com) for a chance to win a signed copy of Bob Marckini's second edition book, [\*You Can Beat Prostate Cancer\*](#).

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# Gift for Teacher

On the first day of school, the children brought gifts for their teacher. The supermarket manager's daughter brought the teacher a basket of assorted fruit. The florist's son brought the teacher a bouquet of pink roses. The candy store owner's daughter gave the teacher a box of chocolate truffles.

Then the liquor-store owner's son brought up a big, heavy box. The teacher lifted it up and noticed that it was leaking a little bit. She touched a drop of the liquid with her finger and tasted it.

"Is it wine?" she guessed. "No," the boy replied. She tasted another couple of drops and asked, "Champagne?"

"No," said the little boy... "It's a puppy!"

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# Old Goats

Groups of Americans were traveling by tour bus through Holland. As they stopped at a cheese farm, a young guide led them through the process of cheese making, explaining that goat's milk was used. She showed the group a lovely hillside where many goats were grazing.

"These are the older goats put out to pasture when they no longer produce," she explained. She then asked, "What do you do in America with your old goats?"

A spry old gentleman answered, "They send us on bus tours."



# An Observation

In Africa, some of the native tribes have a custom of beating the ground with clubs and uttering spine-chilling cries. Anthropologists call this a form of primitive self-expression. In our country we refer to it as “golf.”

## Smart Move

My memory is going fast, so I changed my password to “incorrect.” That way when I log in with the wrong password the computer will tell me: “Your password is incorrect.”



odds & ends

## Best Places to Retire Abroad

Thinking about retiring abroad? According to *U.S. News & World Report*, these [eight destinations stand out](#) in 2025 for their warm weather, affordability, access to healthcare, and ease of settling in as an expat.

- **Ambergris Caye, Belize** — a tranquil, English-speaking Caribbean island with tropical climate, retiree-friendly tax policies, and a straightforward long-stay visa (QRP) program
- **Cascais, Portugal** — a charming coastal town near Lisbon offering moderate cost of living, quality healthcare, and accessible retiree visa (D7 or D9)
- **Crete, Greece** — an island with warm Mediterranean climate, laid-back lifestyle, and residency pathways via property investment or retiree programs
- **Kotor Bay, Montenegro** — a stunning Adriatic destination that combines affordability, scenic beauty, and emerging infrastructure for expats
- **Kyrenia, Northern Cyprus** — a peaceful coastal town in Turkish Cyprus offering low cost of living, Mediterranean climate, and ease of settling in

- **Mazatlán, Mexico** — a vibrant oceanfront city with warm weather, affordable living, good healthcare options, and strong expat networks
  - **Medellín, Colombia** — known for its year-round spring climate, modern infrastructure, green spaces, and low-cost, high-quality medical care
  - **Valencia, Spain** — a culturally rich Mediterranean city with excellent public services, healthcare, sunny weather, and affordable retiree visa options
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## 15 Fascinating Facts About the Human Body

1. On average, a person blinks around 15-20 times per minute, totaling up to 28,800 times a day.
2. A sneeze can travel at speeds of up to 100 miles per hour, dispersing around 100,000 germs into the air.
3. Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, natural chemicals that promote feelings of happiness and reduce stress.
4. Humans spend approximately six years of their lives dreaming—an astonishing testament to the realm of imagination.
5. Approximately 10% of the world's population is left-handed, and many famous artists and thinkers fall into this category.
6. Yawning is contagious—even reading or thinking about yawning can trigger the urge to yawn.
7. Nails don't continue to grow after death. The skin retracts, giving the illusion of nail growth.
8. Learning a second language can lead to structural changes in the brain, enhancing cognitive abilities.
9. Around 5% of adults engage in sleep talking, often during non-REM sleep stages.
10. Studies suggest that the average human attention span is now shorter than that of a goldfish, lasting around nine seconds.

11. Human noses can distinguish between around one trillion scents, showcasing their remarkable olfactory abilities.
12. The stapes bone in the human ear is the smallest bone and plays a crucial role in hearing.
13. Taste and smell are interconnected. Around 80% of what we perceive as taste is influenced by our sense of smell.
14. The brain consumes around 20% of the body's total energy, despite comprising only about 2% of body weight.
15. Smiling can boost your mood, even if it's forced. The act of smiling triggers the release of dopamine.

[Source](#)

## Quote of the Month

*"The obscure we see eventually. The completely obvious, it seems, takes longer."* – Edward R. Murrow



final thought

## Grandpa's Hands

Grandpa, some 90-plus years old, sat feebly on the patio bench. He didn't move—just sat with his head down, staring at his hands.

When I sat down beside him, he didn't acknowledge my presence, and the longer I sat, the more I wondered if he was okay.

Finally, not really wanting to disturb him, but wanting to check on him at the same time, I asked if he was all right.

He raised his head, looked at me, and smiled. “Yes, I’m fine. Thank you for asking,” he said in a clear, strong voice.

“I didn’t mean to disturb you, Grandpa, but you were just sitting here staring at your hands, and I wanted to make sure you were okay,” I explained.

“Have you ever really looked at your hands?” he asked. “I mean, really looked at your hands?”

I slowly opened my hands and stared down at them. I turned them over—palms up, then palms down. No, I guess I had never really looked at my hands as I tried to figure out the point he was making.

Grandpa smiled and shared this story:

“Stop and think for a moment about the hands you have—how they’ve served you well throughout your years. These hands, though wrinkled, shriveled, and weak, have been the tools I’ve used all my life to reach out, grab, and embrace life.

- They put food in my mouth and clothes on my back.
- As a child, my mother taught me to fold them in prayer.
- They tied my shoes and pulled on my boots.
- They have been dirty, scraped and raw, swollen and bent.
- Decorated with my wedding band, they showed the world that I was married and loved someone special.
- They were uneasy and clumsy when I first held my newborn son.
- They trembled and shook when I buried my parents and spouse and walked my daughter down the aisle.
- They have covered my face, combed my hair, and washed and cleansed the rest of my body.
- And to this day, when not much else of me works really well, these hands hold me up, lay me down, and still fold in prayer.
- These hands are the mark of where I’ve been and the ruggedness of my life.
- But more important, it will be these hands that God will reach out and take when He leads me home.

...And with my hands He will lift me to His side and there I will use these hands to touch the face of Christ.”

When my hands are hurting or sore, I think of Grandpa. I know he has been stroked and caressed and held by the hands of God. I, too, want to touch the face of God and feel His

hands upon my face. “For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Fear not, I am the one who helps you.’” (Isaiah 41:13) [Source](#)

Low PSAs to all,

Bob Marckini and Deb Hickey



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