

SCIENCE NEWS[®]

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

Science Service Publication
Volume 146, No. 25, December 17, 1994

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SCIENCE NEWS (ISSN 0036-8423) is published weekly on Saturday, except the last week in December, for \$44.50 for 1 year or \$78.00 for 2 years (foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year) by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing office. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to SCIENCE NEWS, P.O. Box 1925, Marion, Ohio 43305. Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required — old and new addresses, including zip codes, must be provided.

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Editorial and Business Offices:
1719 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
(202-785-2255)

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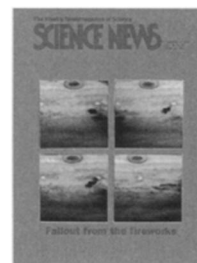
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Cover: Five months after fragments of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 crashed into Jupiter, astronomers are still struggling to make sense of the event. Taken over a month, this sequence of images shows the evolution of the H impact site, clockwise from upper left, as seen by the Hubble Space Telescope. The Great Red Spot is visible at the top of each picture. (Photos: Heidi B. Hammel, Hubble comet team)



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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Letters

Prostate study problems

"Just say no to prostate cancer screening" (SN: 9/17/94, p.180) leaves me puzzled. The article states "they will die of something else" and then goes on to say that prostate cancer is "the second leading cause of cancer death among men"!

Even more puzzling is the claim that "screening will result in net harm." Why?

M.S.J. Fifer
Birmingham, Ala.

The article reports that men with a slow-growing prostate tumor will most likely die of some illness other than prostate cancer, according to some researchers. This does not gainsay the fact that prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among men. Likewise, the article reports Krahn's assertion that widespread screening of men without symptoms can cause reduced quality of life as a result of treatments. Side effects of treatments can include incontinence and impotence. — The Editors

Your article says that treatment extends life only slightly, without saying how far the cancer had progressed.

Men are warned that impotence is a common effect of radiation therapy. They are not told that radiation reduces or stops production of testosterone and semen. As one patient put it, "Now I'm impotent, but I don't give a damn."

John Perry
Winter Haven, Fla.

The findings apply to a general population of men, not just men with cancer. — T. Adler

The Krahn group's conclusions are badly flawed at several points.

They believe that many men diagnosed with prostate cancer would, if untreated, lead normal lives. This is true of the very elderly, who might die of heart disease, pneumonia, or another disease before their cancer kills them. Younger men with prostate neoplasm are regularly killed by their disease. Weighed against early death, incontinence and impotence are usually considered acceptable risks.

The statement that a single PSA test and rectal examination extend life by only a few days is without significance. A basic principle of cancer surgery is that the earlier it is performed, the more likely it is to excise a tumor before the tumor has metastasized. The function of the PSA test is to discover cancer as early as possible.

The Krahn report is likely to do great harm by convincing reluctant men to avoid this very valuable testing modality.

Robert T. Cassell
Weston, Conn.

When one undergoes a prostate needle biopsy further down the screening road, the gland can be infected by the rectal microbes carried into it by the needle.

Next, the needle is withdrawn from the prostate. If it happens to strike malignant cells, they may be strewn all along the needle trail, leading to possible instant metastasis of an otherwise slow-growing tumor.

Bill Sturgeon
Petrolia, Calif.

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