

Wildlife Photographer Kevin Murphy Chooses Proton Therapy for Prostate Cancer

Kevin watched and waited seven years with low-grade prostate cancer. When it was time for treatment, he chose proton therapy.

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Kevin Murphy has many vocations. He's primarily a solutions architect in software program sales, and also a photographer with a thriving portrait and grad photo business, but his "side hustle" and great love is wildlife photography. He loves his excursions to Iceland, Norway and Alaska to photograph bears!

After Kevin had a prostate biopsy in 2015 and it showed low-grade cancer, his urologist cautioned Kevin not to rush into any treatments. Kevin ended up doing active surveillance of his cancer for seven years. During this time he participated in Fred Hutch's [PALS](#) program to help prostate cancer patients lose weight. He met all his goals, and for a while his [PSA](#) went down. But when a third biopsy in 2022 showed that the cancer had grown, it was time to take action.

"It was scary at first," says Kevin. "I had gained a kind of confidence during those seven years. So, I did research about all the different treatment methods, which made me feel more informed. The doctor and I put down the pros and cons of each therapy, and we created a treatment plan I knew I could trust."

Quality of life weighed heavily on Kevin's decision. He wanted as few side effects as possible, especially sexual ones, and proton therapy seemed to be the best option. He met with [Emily Weg](#), MD, at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center – Proton Therapy and started treatment in March 2022.

"The first week was no big deal," he says. "Then I got more tired. I took a leave of absence from work and I took naps. But the worst side effects weren't from proton therapy. They were from the hormone shots I got. First of all, that's a big needle they stick in the hip. It also gave me hot flashes and made me very emotional."

"Hormone therapy for prostate cancer consists of testosterone-lowering medication," says Weg. "The rationale for giving the medication is that testosterone acts like fuel for prostate cancer cells, so by suppressing testosterone we're essentially starving the cancer cells of their fuel. And it

works synergistically with radiation therapy. Unfortunately, it has several potential side effects that are completely different from the potential side effects associated with radiation for prostate cancer. It's not unusual for patients to have a tougher time tolerating the hormone therapy than the radiation treatment."

Kevin is now feeling back to his normal self. Less than two months after finishing proton therapy, he went to Alaska to take bear photos. He's had four checkups every three months and his PSA is in continuous decline. He's also happy to report that proton therapy came through for him with minimal side effects.

"It was exciting to watch Kevin grow his skill and passion for photography during his treatment," recalls Weg. "Cancer treatment is never easy, and being able to focus on hobbies or passions can be a wonderfully helpful outlet."

Kevin met other prostate cancer patients at the proton therapy facility, and he says they watched out for each other. He also fondly remembers the staff and recalls looking forward to seeing his treatment team every day. "They always seemed to put in the extra effort in my care," he says.

Kevin advises other cancer patients to talk to other people who've gone through treatment and to not rush in making a decision. But don't ignore it either.

"Routine checkups, doctors that cared and treatment that worked," says Kevin. "That's what saved me. It may be a bear, but it won't be prostate cancer that gets me."

Cancer changed Kevin's perspective on life, and he's decided to make more room for the things he loves. He is planning another trip to Alaska to photograph bears. He will camp with guides and be surrounded by electric fences at night. Polar bears, and especially grizzlies, are some of his favorite subjects because they are so entertaining.

Check out some of Kevin's polar [wildlife photos](#) and Alaska [grizzly bear](#) photos.

Kevin is also interested in expanding his wildlife focus to other animals. He plans to pursue photography of wild horses. He's thinking about a trip to the Outer Banks for that. Also on his wish list is a trip to Africa to photograph the "Big 5" — lions, leopards, elephants, buffalo and rhinos.

In the meantime, he's spending time with his three daughters and seven grandchildren, all of whom live nearby. He's very involved in their lives and loves hanging out with them.

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