Prostate cancer

The prostate gland lies just below your bladder. It helps produce healthy sperm. Problems with the prostate gland can affect how you urinate and your sexual function.

Risk

You are at higher risk of prostate cancer if you:
• are aged 50 or older
• have a close relative, for example brother or father, who has had prostate cancer
• are of black ethnic origin (double the risk)

PSA test

PSA is measured using the PSA blood test. Most men will not have a raised PSA level. A raised PSA level (3 or over) can be caused by many things, such as a urinary infection, an enlarged prostate or prostate cancer.

If you decide you want a PSA test, refrain from vigorous exercise such as cycling or sex in the 2 days before the test. A prostate biopsy or cystoscopy in the 6 weeks before the test may also affect the PSA level.

Test results and follow-up

If you have a raised PSA level your GP will discuss referral to a specialist with you. You may have further investigations, such as an MRI scan of the prostate and a biopsy. A biopsy involves taking small samples of your prostate usually through your back passage or perineum (the skin just in front of the anus) and checking them for cancer.

If you have prostate cancer, your specialist will discuss options. Active surveillance is normally and safely offered to men with slow-growing cancers, that have not spread outside of the prostate gland. This involves regular tests to monitor the cancer, with treatment offered if the cancer starts to progress.

Treatments include surgery, radiotherapy, hormone therapy and chemotherapy. The type of treatment offered will depend on how advanced the cancer is and how fast it is growing. Side effects of treatment can include problems with erections, loss of fertility and incontinence.

Find out more at www.nhs.uk/psa
The PSA test and what the results might mean

**Pros**

1. **A PSA test** measures the amount of PSA molecules in a patient’s blood.

2. It’s normal for all men to have some PSA in their blood.

3. A raised PSA level can be a sign of prostate cancer, **BUT...**

4. It can be raised for lots of other reasons including...

   - A urinary or urinary tract infection (UTI)
   - Recent vigorous exercise
   - Prostate stimulation, recent ejaculation or anal sex
   - Other prostate problems, such as an enlarged prostate

---

**Cons**

- You might have a raised PSA level, even if you do not have cancer. Many men with a raised PSA level do not have prostate cancer.

- The PSA test can miss prostate cancer. 1 in 7 men with a normal PSA level may have prostate cancer, and 1 in 50 men with a normal PSA level may have a fast-growing cancer.

- If your PSA level is raised you may need a biopsy. This can cause side effects, such as pain, infection and bleeding. Not all men will need to have a biopsy.

- You might be diagnosed with a slow-growing cancer that would never have caused any problems or shortened your life. Being diagnosed with cancer could make you worry, and you might decide to have treatment you do not need. Treatments can cause side effects which can affect your daily life, such as urinary, bowel and erection problems.

---

**Should I have a PSA test?**

Before you decide whether to have the test, think about the information in this leaflet. Talk to your GP about the advantages and disadvantages of the test and your own risk of prostate cancer. Having a PSA test is a personal decision – what might be important to one man may not be to another.

**Advantages**

A PSA test can help pick up prostate cancer before you have any symptoms.

A PSA test can help pick up a fast-growing cancer at an early stage, when treatment could stop it spreading and causing problems or shortening your life.

**Disadvantages**

For more information on prostate cancer and prostate problems visit cancerresearchuk.org and prostatecanceruk.org

---

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit OGL. Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Image © Shutterstock

Infographic provided by Cancer Research UK. Text on advantages and disadvantages by Prostate Cancer UK

PHE gateway number: GW-992

© Crown copyright 2020