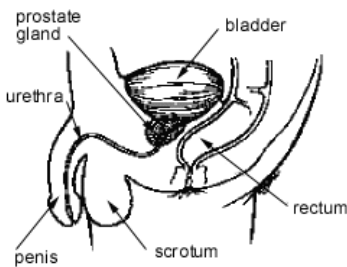


# Screening for Prostate Cancer

## What you need to know to make an informed decision

### ■ What is my prostate?

The prostate is part of the male reproductive system. It is a walnut-sized gland located at the base of the bladder and in front of the rectum. Its main job is to produce fluid that mixes with and transports sperm during ejaculation.



Male reproductive system

The prostate gland is important because two very common medical conditions can occur with it: *benign prostatic hyperplasia* (also referred to as *BPH*) and *prostate cancer*.

### ■ What is benign prostatic hyperplasia?

As men age, the prostate gland slowly grows larger. This growth, termed benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), is a natural part of the aging process. Almost every man will have BPH as they age. BPH is non-cancerous and is not a danger to your health. However, BPH often causes problems with urination that can become bothersome.

#### *Symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia:*

- *Difficulty initiating urination*
- *Decreased strength of urine stream*
- *Dribbling after urination*
- *Urge to urinate again soon after urinating*
- *Need to get up at night to urinate*

The symptoms of BPH can be reduced with certain medications, such as *finasteride* and *terazosin*, and with the herbal supplement *saw palmetto*. In more severe cases, surgery may be considered. In many cases, patients don't need any treatment at all.

### ■ What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is a cancer of the prostate gland. Like any cancer, prostate cancer occurs when cells begin to grow out of control within the body. As more and more cells are formed, a mass (or tumor) is formed, which may eventually invade and destroy other parts of the body. Common sites that prostate cancer invades include the bladder, colon, rectum, and bone (especially the spine).

#### ***Is benign prostate hyperplasia the same as prostate cancer?***

*No. As a man ages, the prostate can increase in size many times without becoming cancerous. The medical term for non-cancerous prostate enlargement is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). Prostate enlargement is not the same as prostate cancer, and it cannot "turn into" prostate cancer.*

Unlike BPH, prostate cancer can be a danger to your health. The best chance at curing prostate cancer is to detect it early. The symptoms of prostate cancer can be similar to those of BPH, but they tend to occur later in the course of the disease, after much damage has already been done. Since prostate cancer may not cause symptoms early on, several methods of screening can be used to make sure it does not go undiagnosed.

### ■ How can I screen for prostate cancer?

There are two main methods to screen for early prostate cancer: the *prostate-specific antigen (PSA)* test and *digital rectal exam (DRE)*.

During a digital rectal exam (DRE), your doctor can examine your prostate by putting a gloved, lubricated finger a few inches into your rectum to feel the prostate gland. A normal prostate feels firm and smooth. If roughness or lumpy areas are felt, your doctor may suspect cancer and further testing may be necessary.

The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test is a blood test that measures levels of a certain protein made by your prostate. When levels of this protein are increased, it can mean that you have prostate cancer. However, interpretation of the test results can be problematic.

*The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test may find prostate cancer that can't be felt by digital rectal exam (DRE). When found earlier, prostate cancer may be easier to cure. However, a PSA can suggest cancer is present when, in reality, it is not. This can lead to unnecessary worry on your part, and a series of confirmatory tests then must be done to rule out cancer.*

Conditions other than prostate cancer can cause your PSA levels to be increased, including infection of the prostate and BPH. For this reason, further tests (such as tissue biopsy) are usually necessary to confirm prostate cancer when PSA levels are high.

### ■ Who gets prostate cancer?

All men are at risk for developing prostate cancer. Other than skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer found in American men. While every man is at risk, there are several known risk factors that make prostate cancer more likely.

#### ***Prostate Cancer Risk Factors***

- *Age: The greatest risk factor for prostate cancer is increased age*
- *Family history: Having a father or brother with the disease doubles your risk*
- *Race: African-Americans have the highest occurrence of prostate cancer*

In most men, prostate cancer grows very slowly. In fact, many men with the disease will never know they had the condition. Early prostate cancer is confined to the prostate gland itself, and the majority of patients with this type of cancer can live for years without problems. Many affected men will end up dying from causes entirely unrelated to their prostate cancer.

While most cases of prostate cancer are slow growing, prostate cancer can be aggressive. In these cases, the cancer grows quickly and spreads to other parts of the body, causing significant complications.

### ■ Who should be screened?

Because prostate cancer grows so slowly, most doctors do not recommend screening in men once they reach their 70s. Many doctors recommend that men at high risk (African-American men and men with a family history of prostate cancer) should be screened. However, there is not consensus amongst doctors on whether prostate cancer screening should be done for men who are not at high risk.

Most doctors will use the DRE to screen their patients for prostate cancer because it is quick, easy, and inexpensive. On the other hand, the use of the PSA blood test to screen all patients remains controversial.

As previously mentioned, the PSA test often comes back positive even when there is no underlying prostate cancer. In fact, this may be the case in up to 3/4 of positive test results. These false positives may cause you unnecessary worry about cancer

when in reality you are perfectly healthy. Positive test results mean you must undergo further testing to rule out prostate cancer definitively. Usually a tissue sample, which involves taking multiple needle biopsies of the prostate gland, is examined under a microscope to check for cancer.

Another concern is that early diagnosis of prostate cancer does not necessarily improve outcome. Many studies on the subject have been unable to show that screening for prostate cancer actually prolongs lives. Additionally, side-effects of treating prostate cancer need to be considered. Treatment of prostate cancer usually involves surgery to remove the gland itself. The procedure can damage surrounding nerves, resulting in sexual dysfunction and/or urinary dribbling in up to 50% of cases.

Only the American Cancer Society recommends screening for all men over age 50. The National Cancer Institute, the U. S. Preventive Services Task Force, and the American Academy of Family Physicians all believe the choice should be left up to individual men and their doctors.

### ■ Should I be screened?

Ultimately, the decision is yours to make. The role of your doctor is to inform you about the many advantages and disadvantages of screening. Different doctors will have different positions on whether or not you should get a PSA test. But don't let your doctor dissuade you if you feel strongly one way or the other. Remember, it is your body and your health. You should always be the one who makes the final decision.

#### ***Facts About Prostate Cancer***

- *An estimated 189,000 men in the U.S. are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year.*
- *One man in six will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime, but only one man in 30 will die of this disease.*
- *Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in men in the U.S. (Lung cancer is first.)*
- *About 96% of all men diagnosed with prostate cancer survive at least five years, and 75% survive at least 10 years.*
- *In men whose cancer has not spread beyond the prostate, the five-year survival rate is nearly 100%.*

*For more information about prostate cancer screening, please visit the National Cancer Institute website at <http://www.cancer.gov>.*