

# About Prostate Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'About prostate cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

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- Should I see a prostate cancer specialist?
- Questions for your doctor

## The prostate

### Where the prostate is

The prostate is a gland found only in men. It surrounds the urethra, which is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the penis. This tube also carries semen.

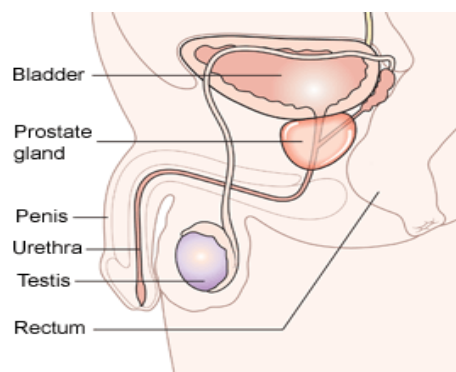


Diagram showing the position of the prostate and rectum  
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## What the prostate does

The prostate gland makes the fluid part of semen. It needs the male sex hormone, testosterone, to grow and function. So some treatments for prostate cancer work by reducing the levels of testosterone.

## Prostate cancer symptoms

The most common symptoms of prostate cancer and an enlarged prostate that is not cancerous are the same. They are

- Having to rush to the toilet to pass urine
- Difficulty in passing urine
- Passing urine more often than usual, especially at night
- Pain on passing urine
- Blood in the urine or semen but this is very rare

## What causes the symptoms?

With both prostate cancers and non cancerous enlargement of the prostate, the symptoms are usually caused because the growth presses on the tube that carries urine (the urethra) and blocks the flow.

If you have any symptoms, do see your doctor. Most enlargements of the prostate are not cancer (they are benign) and can be easily treated.



Do also remember that very early prostate cancer does not usually cause any symptoms at all because any growth in the prostate is too small to have any noticeable effect on urine flow.

### Other symptoms of prostate cancer

Cancer of the prostate often grows slowly, especially in older men. Symptoms may be mild and occur over many years. Sometimes the first symptoms are from prostate cancer cells which have spread to your bones. This may cause pain in your back, hips, pelvis or other bony areas. This is known as secondary prostate cancer.

### Prostate cancer risks and causes

Prostate cancer is now the most common cancer in men in the UK (not counting non melanoma skin cancer). There are some risk factors that we know about.

Age is the most significant risk factor. More than half of all cases are diagnosed in men over 70. It is quite rare in men under 50.

You may also be more at risk if you

- Have a family history of prostate or breast cancer
- Are black (of African ancestry) – prostate cancer is more common in black and mixed race men than white or Asian men

Your diet may affect your risk. There is a lot of research going on and the evidence is not strong but you may increase your prostate cancer risk if you eat a diet high in dairy products. There is some evidence that lycopene from tomatoes may lower the risk.

Some studies have shown that having diabetes, and perhaps taking aspirin or other non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

### Screening for prostate cancer

The aim of screening is to diagnose disease at an early stage, before symptoms start. This is when it is easier to treat and is more likely to be curable. Before screening can be carried out, there must be an accurate test to use. At the moment, there is no national screening programme for prostate cancer in the UK because trials have not yet shown clear evidence that screening will reduce deaths from this disease. If you ask your GP to check you for prostate cancer they will do the following

- Examine your prostate by putting a gloved finger into your back passage and feeling the prostate gland
- Take a blood test for PSA – prostate specific antigen

Generally speaking, the higher the PSA level, the more likely there is cancer present. But the PSA can be raised for other reasons, such as infection or a non cancerous enlarged prostate.

PSA alone is not recommended for screening in the UK because

- Men with prostate cancer may not have a raised PSA
- 2 out of 3 men with a raised PSA do not have prostate cancer
- There is uncertainty about the best way to treat early prostate cancer
- The treatments can cause unpleasant side effects and reduce quality of life



Clinical trials are looking into prostate cancer screening.

Men who have a relative with prostate cancer are at a higher risk of developing it themselves. They may be able to have screening with a PSA test or rectal examination from the age of 40 to 45.

### Should I see a prostate cancer specialist?

It can be very difficult for GPs to decide who may have a suspected cancer and who may have something much more minor that will go away on its own. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) have produced guidelines for GPs to help them decide which patients need to be seen urgently by a specialist called a urologist.

It is important when reading these guidelines to remember that 99% of men diagnosed with prostate cancer are over 50. And 75% are over 70.

The guidelines say you should ideally have get an appointment within 2 weeks for an urgent referral if you have

- Abnormalities in your prostate that your GP can feel during a rectal examination
- A PSA test that is considered high for your age
- A borderline PSA test, followed by a repeat test 1 - 3 months later that shows the level is rising

- A raised PSA reading, together with other symptoms that may be linked to prostate cancer

If you have symptoms and you do not think your GP is taking them seriously enough, you could print off this page and take it to your appointment. You may be able to decided together whether you need to see a specialist and how soon.

### What to ask your doctor about prostate cancer

- How will I know if I might get prostate cancer?
- Will I feel pain if I have it?
- Do you think I should be screened?
- What are the tests?
- I am having difficulty passing urine. Should I have a blood test for prostate cancer?
- There is prostate cancer in my family. Does this increase the risk of getting it myself?



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## Notes

### More information

For more information about prostate cancer, visit our website  
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on  
**0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

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Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in November 2010. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2010. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).