

# Early detection of prostate cancer

## What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is the growth of abnormal cells in the prostate gland. This gland is only found in males and is about the size of a walnut. It is situated where the bladder joins the urethra. We don't know what causes prostate cancer but it may be related to diet and lifestyle.

Prostate cancer is now the most common cancer among men, apart from skin cancer. Each year more than 10,500 Australian men are diagnosed. It affects mostly men in the older age groups and is rare in men under 45 years of age.

## What is the chance of a diagnosis of prostate cancer:

For a man in his 40s	1 in 1,000
For a man in his 50s	12 in 1,000
For a man in his 60s	45 in 1,000
For a man in his 70s	79 in 1,000

*(These risks are population estimates and do not take into account family history).*

Men who have a close relative (father, brother, son) diagnosed with prostate cancer are at twice the risk of developing the disease. Men with a close relative diagnosed before the age of 60 are at a higher risk than someone whose relative was diagnosed later in life. Men at a greater risk should consider being tested on a regular basis.

## What are the symptoms of prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer in the early stages rarely has symptoms. Symptoms usually develop in older men but any man experiencing any of the following should contact their doctor promptly:

- Difficulty passing urine
- A slow, interrupted flow of urine
- Frequent passing of urine
- Blood in urine
- Pain during urination
- Recent onset of back or pelvic pain associated with urinary problems.

These symptoms are also very common in men who may have a benign (non-cancerous) enlargement of the prostate gland. This is far more common than cancer of the prostate. Some cases of prostate cancer are slow growing and will not harm your health. Others however can be aggressive and cause death.

## How is prostate cancer detected?

There is no single, simple test to detect prostate cancer. Prostate cancer may be suspected either by the feel of the prostate during rectal examination

by your doctor or by a blood test to see if your prostate specific antigen (PSA) is above normal levels for your age.

**Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA)** test is a blood test that measures the level of PSA in your blood. Virtually all PSA is produced by the prostate gland. Broadly, the range of 0 to 4ng/ml is considered normal, while over 4ng/ml may be considered elevated. The normal range for you will vary depending on your age.

A PSA above the normal range may indicate the possibility of prostate cancer. However two thirds of cases of elevated PSA are due to non cancerous conditions such as prostatitis and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

**Digital Rectal Examination (DRE)** involves your doctor inserting a gloved finger into the rectum to feel the prostate gland. Some abnormality may be felt, but it is not possible to feel the entire prostate or a small cancer. One that is out of reach of the finger may be missed.

If either of the above tests are positive, other tests are necessary to confirm a diagnosis of prostate cancer. It is likely that a **trans-rectal ultrasound (TRUS)** and biopsy will be needed. The ultrasound gives an image of the prostate allowing for a more accurate biopsy. If cancer is detected, treatment options will need to be considered.

## Should I have a PSA test?

If you have no symptoms and are thinking about having a PSA test, you need to consider the risks and benefits. It is important to balance the benefit of detecting a prostate cancer early, against the risk that detection and treatment may not be necessary. Treatment may affect your lifestyle including sexual function, but may also save your life.

You should make your own decision about whether to be tested after discussion with your doctor. It is important for you to obtain good quality information to make an informed decision.

## Where can I get reliable information?

### The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

for information and support for you and your family.  
[www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)

Booklet: 'Localised prostate cancer: a guide for men and their families'.

*Mr PHIP fact sheet series.*

### Australian Prostate Cancer Collaboration

[www.prostatehealth.org.au](http://www.prostatehealth.org.au)

### Andrology Australia

[www.andrologyaustralia.org](http://www.andrologyaustralia.org)

