

After a diagnosis of prostate cancer



After finding out you have prostate cancer, you may feel shocked, upset, anxious or confused. These are normal responses. You may find it helpful to talk about your treatment options with your doctor, family and friends. Ask questions and seek as much information as you feel you need. It is up to you as to how involved you want to be in making decisions about your treatment.

Apart from non-melanoma skin cancer, prostate cancer is now the most common cancer among men. Each year more than 16,000 Australian men are diagnosed.

Prostate cancer is unusual in that it is slow growing in some men and not a threat, but for others the cancer can be aggressive. Cure rates for prostate cancer are improving, however side-effects of treatment may affect your lifestyle including sexual function and continence.

How is prostate cancer treated?

You may have a number of different health care professionals involved in your treatment and care. The decision on how best to treat prostate cancer depends on your age, general health and the grade and stage of your cancer. Although nearly all treatments have side-effects, most can be effectively managed. Ask your doctor to explain what side-effects to expect and how best to manage these.

Active surveillance is sometimes a valid option and your doctor will 'watch and wait'. Some prostate cancers are slow growing and occur in older men, so they are not always a threat to life. The possible side-effects of treatment such as surgery may have more impact on your life than the cancer. You will still need regular prostate tests, which may include repeated biopsies to make sure things haven't changed if 'watchful waiting' is chosen.

Surgery is the removal of the prostate (prostatectomy). Sometimes the surrounding tissue may also be removed. Surgery requires on average three to six days in hospital, followed by a six week recovery period.

Surgery is an option if you have localised prostate cancer (the cancer has not spread outside the prostate gland) and you are fit for surgery. Once the cancer has spread outside the prostate gland, surgery is not normally an option, however other treatments are available.

Radiation therapy uses x-rays to destroy cancer cells. Radiation therapy may be recommended to treat localised prostate cancer. It may be used instead of surgery or in combination with surgery. It can also be used to reduce the size of the cancer and relieve pain, discomfort or other symptoms.

Hormone treatment involves reducing the male hormone, testosterone, to help slow the growth of the cancer. This is done by using drugs that stop the release of hormones that cause the testicles to produce testosterone. This is an option where the cancer has spread, or if you are unsuitable for other surgery or radiation therapy. Hormone manipulation is not a cure for localised prostate cancer, however it will usually stop the prostate cancer from growing. This remission can last several years.

Chemotherapy may not be routinely used when prostate cancer is first diagnosed, however may be offered if the cancer spreads and other treatments have not been effective.

Diet therapy, or eating a healthy diet, including a variety of foods will ensure you have what your body needs to cope with treatment and recovery. Be sure to discuss your diet with your dietician and doctor.

Exercise therapy can improve your cancer recovery. Research has shown that regular physical activity is beneficial and can reduce side-effects such as fatigue. Talk to your physiotherapist or exercise physiologist and doctor.

What about my physical and emotional wellness?

- Don't be afraid to ask for professional and emotional support.
- Consider joining a cancer support group.
- Learn to ignore unwanted advice and 'horror stories'.
- Live day-to-day and remember that every day is likely to be different.

Complementary therapies can work alongside medical treatments and some have been shown to improve quality of life or reduce pain. There is no evidence that these therapies can cure or prevent cancer. It is important to remember that some of these therapies have not been tested for side-effects, may work against other medical treatments and may be expensive. Let your doctor know about all complementary therapies you are thinking of using.

Where can I get reliable information?

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

Cancer Council Australia website

(with links to state and territory Cancer Councils)

www.cancer.org.au

Australian Prostate Cancer Collaboration

www.prostatehealth.org.au

Andrology Australia

www.andrologyaustralia.org