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. Talk about your treatment options with your doctor, family and friends. Ask questions and seek as much information as you need. It is up to you as to how involved you want to be in making decisions about your treatment.

After non-melanoma skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men. Each year around 18,000 men in Australia are diagnosed.

Prostate cancer commonly grows more slowly than other types of cancer. However, some prostate cancers can grow and spread more quickly. 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?
The best treatment for your 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 what side-effects to expect and how best to manage these.

Active surveillance is sometimes a valid option and is a way of monitoring prostate cancer when it isn’t causing symptoms or problems. This form of treatment may be suggested by your doctor if the cancer is small and slow growing and unlikely to spread. 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.

Watchful waiting is another way of monitoring prostate cancer in case symptoms develop or change. It involves regular prostate specific antigen (PSA) tests and check ups. Watchful waiting is not as strict as active surveillance and additional biopsies are not usually needed.

Surgery involves the removal of the prostate (prostatectomy), and sometimes the surrounding tissue. Surgery requires on average three to six days in hospital, followed by a four to 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 (radiotherapy) 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. Radiation therapy can be delivered externally using external beam radiation therapy which uses targeted radiation to destroy or damage cancer cells. Internally delivered radiation therapy (brachytherapy) places the radiation source within the prostate.

Androgen deprivation therapy (or hormone therapy) 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 surgery or radiation therapy. This is the main treatment for advanced prostate cancer.

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.

What about my physical and emotional wellness?
Eating a healthy diet including a variety of foods, will ensure you have what your body needs to cope with treatment and recovery. Regular physical activity can improve your cancer recovery and reduce side-effects such as fatigue. Regular physical activity can improve your cancer recovery and reduce side-effects such as fatigue. Talk to your physiotherapist or exercise physiologist and doctor.

• 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. Some have not been tested for side-effects, may work against other medical treatments and may be expensive. Talk to your doctor about using complementary therapies.

Contact Cancer Council for a free copy of Understanding Prostate Cancer.

WHERE CAN I GET RELIABLE INFORMATION?
Cancer Council 13 11 20
Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

www.cancer.org.au
Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia
prostate.org.au
Andrology Australia
andrologyaustralia.org