

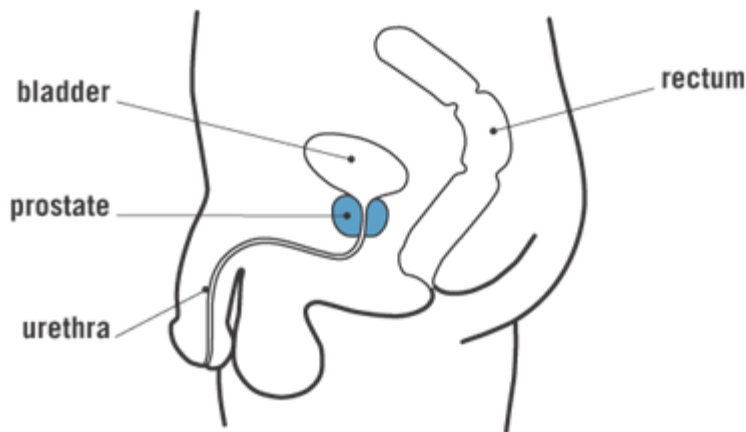
What you need to know About the PSA Test

This information sheet will tell you about:

- Prostate Cancer
- PSA blood test

What is the prostate?

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland that only men have. It is part of the reproductive system that makes the fluid that carries sperm. As you can see in the picture below, the prostate is located in front of the rectum and just below the bladder.



As men get older, the prostate tends to get bigger. This can put pressure on the urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder to outside the body) and reduce urine flow.

How common is prostate cancer?

- One in thirty men will die from prostate cancer.
- It is more common in men whose fathers or brothers have had it.
- It is more common in African-Americans.

By the age of 75, one out of every three men will have some cancer in the prostate gland. Most of these cancers in older men will never cause problems because they usually grow slowly. The younger a man is, the more likely it is that a prostate cancer he has will cause him trouble. Luckily, prostate cancer is less common in younger men.

What is the PSA blood test?

Doctors can use a blood test to find some cancers of the prostate gland. This test is called the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test. The PSA test can:

- Find some prostate cancers that cannot be felt by a digital rectal exam (finger test), and
- find some cancers earlier when they may be easier to cure

But the PSA test will also:

- Miss some cancers, and
- suggest a problem in some men who do not have cancer.

How is the PSA test done?

A small amount of blood is taken from a vein in your arm. The doctor checks the blood to see if the PSA level is normal. If the test results are normal, there is nothing more to do. You and your doctor may decide to do the PSA test again at a later date.

What if the results of the test are abnormal?

Do not panic! The PSA test often suggests problems in men who do not have prostate cancer.

As you get older, you are more likely to have abnormal PSA test results.

- Men in their 50s have a 1 in 15 chance of an abnormal test.
- For men in their sixties, the chances rise to 1 in 8.
- For men in their 70s, the chances increase again to 1 in 4.

The first thing to do is take another PSA test. If the results are still abnormal, then you may want to think about having a small piece of your prostate taken out with a needle (a biopsy). Your doctor can help you decide about this. In general, you have a one in three chance that a biopsy will find prostate cancer after a PSA test is abnormal.

What happens if prostate cancer is found?

Prostate cancer can be treated in many ways or not at all. Not treating a cancer may sound silly, but this makes sense for some men because:

- Medical experts are not sure that treatment of early prostate cancer saves lives.
- Prostate cancer treatment can cause problems men do not want to have.

Treatment choices are:

- **Surgery.** Remove the entire prostate and the cancer in it. After surgery, some men have trouble with leaking urine. Problems having an erection are also common.
- **Radiation (X-rays).** Treats cancer in and near the prostate. Radiation has a lower chance of causing problems with leaking urine or with erections than surgery. Some men have problems with their bowel movements after x-ray treatment.
- **Watchful waiting.** Keeps tabs on the situation with regular tests. Avoids surgery and x-ray problems but may miss the chance to cure some cancers.
- **Medicines (Hormone treatment).** May shrink the prostate and change the PSA test results. Medicines are often used to treat prostate cancers that come back after surgery or radiation. Medicines are also used to treat prostate cancer problems that can happen during watchful waiting.

Should I have the PSA test?

If you are age 50 or older (age 45 if you are African American), it is a good idea to discuss the PSA test with your doctor. This is the age when it is important for most men to think about having the PSA test.

Your doctor cannot tell you how much a PSA test will reduce your chance of dying from prostate cancer. This is what makes the choice so hard. Most prostate cancer grows slowly, so many doctors feel that the PSA test is not helpful to men after age 75. At that age, problems may never develop, even if you do have signs of early prostate cancer. However, at any age, the best judge of whether to get a PSA test is the patient. You need to know your risk factors (age, race, family history) and weigh the pros and cons of the test.

Men have different reasons for the choices they make.

Reasons men choose to have the PSA test are:

- The test can discover cancers earlier.
- Early treatment may save lives.
- They will feel good if the test is normal.

Reasons men choose not to have the PSA test are:

- The treatments for prostate cancer have not been proven to save lives and are known to cause problems for some men.
- The test often suggests prostate cancer is present when it is not.
- They will not have to worry about medical problems and costs when it is not necessary.

This document is intended to provide health related information so that you may be better informed. It is not a substitute for your doctor's medical advice and should not be relied upon for treatment for specific medical conditions.

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