American Cancer Society®

Testing for
Prostate Cancer

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Who this booklet is for:

This booklet is to help men who do not have any symptoms decide if they want to be tested.

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Prostate cancer affects many men. There are tests to find it early.

There may be benefits and risks with testing. Research has not yet proven that the benefits of testing outweigh the risks.

This booklet will help you decide if you want to be tested for prostate cancer.

Is testing the right choice for me?

Right now you might not know if you want to be tested. After reading this booklet, we hope that you'll be able to talk with your doctor about how you feel about testing. Here we will talk more about prostate cancer testing and the possible benefits and risks of testing.

> *"Should I be tested? Is it the right choice for me?*

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Does the American Cancer Society say that all men should be tested for prostate cancer?

No, we do not for these reasons:

- **The research is not clear.** Some research shows that finding prostate cancer early will stop some men from dying from the disease. Other research does not show this.
- **All prostate cancers are not the same.** Many prostate cancers grow slowly. These do not cause any harm. Some prostate cancers grow fast. They spread to other parts of the body. They cause problems and can even cause death. The tests we have today often cannot tell us which prostate cancers will cause harm and which ones will not. This means men with slow-growing cancers might get treatment that they don't need.
- **Testing is not perfect**, but the tests are the best we have today. The tests can sometimes suggest a man has cancer even when he doesn't. The tests can also miss a prostate cancer, and a man might think that he did not have prostate cancer when he did.
- **Treatment can have serious side effects.** For men who are tested and found to have prostate cancer, treatment for prostate cancer can have some serious side effects. These side effects can include problems controlling your urine, problems with your bowels, and/or problems having sex.

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The American Cancer Society says that men should make an informed decision. This means that you should learn about prostate cancer and testing. You should think about the risks and possible benefits. Then after talking with your doctor, you should decide if testing is the right choice for you.

If you are tested and have prostate cancer, you may need treatment for the prostate cancer. Treatment can have side effects.

About prostate cancer

What is prostate cancer?

Cancer begins in your body when normal cells start to grow out of control. In prostate cancer, prostate cells grow out of control. They can spread and affect nearby organs. They can also spread to distant parts of the body and cause problems.

How common is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men (after skin cancer). The chance of having prostate cancer goes up with age.

Are all prostate cancers the same?

No, they are not. Many prostate cancers grow slowly. These are not likely to cause any harm. Some prostate cancers grow fast. They spread to other parts of the body where they cause problems and can even cause death.

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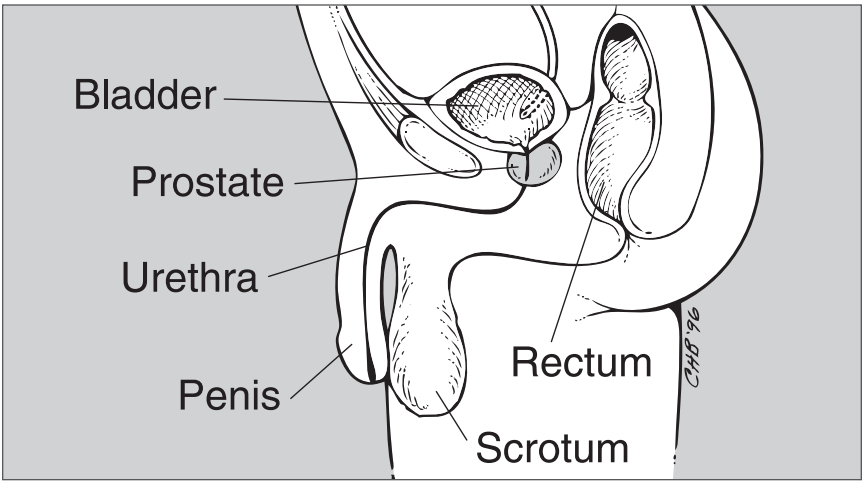

What causes prostate cancer?

We don't know what causes this cancer. We do know that certain things cause some men to have a higher chance of having prostate cancer than others. Some of these are age, family history, and race. We call these risk factors because they increase your risk of having prostate cancer.

- **Age:** Your age is the strongest risk factor. The chance of having prostate cancer goes up quickly after age 50.
- **Family history:** Men with a father or brother who had prostate cancer are more likely to get prostate cancer, too. This is even more likely if the father or brother had the cancer before age 65.
- **Race:** We don't know why, but prostate cancer is more common in African American men than in other races.

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What if I am having prostate symptoms now?

If you have pain when you pass urine, blood in your urine, or trouble passing urine, you should talk with your doctor now. These are often symptoms of other prostate problems, but they can also be caused by prostate cancer. The only way to know what's wrong is to see your doctor.

Prostate cancer testing

A PSA blood test and rectal exam can tell your doctor about your prostate. Your doctor might do a PSA blood test alone, or he might do both tests.

What is a PSA test?

This test measures how much PSA is in your blood. PSA stands for prostate-specific antigen – a protein made by the prostate gland.

What is a rectal exam?

With this test, your doctor puts a gloved, lubricated finger into your rectum to feel your prostate gland. A rectal exam can tell if the prostate size, shape, and texture are normal.

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You can have prostate cancer and not have any symptoms. But if you have symptoms, please see a doctor right away.

Can testing tell me for certain that I have prostate cancer?

No. There is no perfect test to look for prostate cancer.

- **PSA test:** There is no PSA level that says for sure that a man has prostate cancer. Your chance of having prostate cancer goes up as your PSA level goes up.

  PSA levels can be high in prostate cancer, but they can also be high with prostate infections and other prostate problems. So, having a high PSA level does NOT always mean that you have prostate cancer.

- **Rectal exam:** Most prostate cancers cannot be felt by a rectal exam. But sometimes rectal exams can find cancer even when the PSA level does not suggest cancer.

As you get older, your risk for prostate cancer increases.

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Can testing tell me for certain that I do not have prostate cancer?

No. If your PSA level is low, you can still have prostate cancer. If your rectal exam does not suggest cancer, you can still have prostate cancer.

The rectal exam is not as good as the PSA test for finding prostate cancer, but it might find cancers in some men with low PSA levels.

So, what happens if my PSA or rectal exam suggests prostate cancer?

If your PSA level or your rectal exam suggests cancer, you may need a biopsy to know for sure if you have prostate cancer.

- A biopsy is done with a needle. The needle is put into the prostate gland.
- Tiny pieces of the prostate gland are removed with the needle.
- These tiny pieces are looked at under a microscope to see if cancer cells are present.
- The biopsy is done as an outpatient and takes only a few minutes.

If your PSA level is high or if your rectal exam is not normal, you will need other tests to find out why.

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These tests are not perfect tests
for finding prostate cancer.

How do I decide if testing is the right choice for me?

Know the facts.

- Know about prostate cancer and other prostate problems.
- Know what the PSA test and rectal exam can and cannot tell you.
- Know what other decisions you may need to make if you are tested.

Ask questions, and talk to others.

- Write down your questions and discuss them with your doctor.
- Talk about testing with your family and those who care about you.

Use the balance scale at the end of this booklet.

- Weigh how you feel about testing.
- Make your decision about testing.

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So, what does the American Cancer Society recommend for me?

Starting at age 50, talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of testing. Then decide if testing is the right choice for you.

If you are African American or have a father or brother who had prostate cancer before age 65, have this talk with your doctor starting at age 45.

This talk should take place at age 40 for men with 2 or more close relatives who had prostate cancer before age 65.

If you decide to be tested, you should have the PSA blood test with or without a rectal exam. How often you're tested will depend on your PSA level and the discussions you have with your doctor.

The decision is yours.

If the biopsy shows cancer cells, you and your doctor will decide how to treat the cancer, or whether treatment is needed at this time.

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If I get tested

What will happen?

- You go to your doctor and get a PSA test and maybe a rectal exam.
- If your test results are cause for concern, you may have a biopsy.

Possible benefits to you

- Testing may find an early prostate cancer – while it's small and before it has spread.
- If it's found early, there may be a better chance of being treated and not dying from prostate cancer.
- Getting tested may give you peace of mind.

Risks to you

- Testing may lead to worry about the results.
- Testing may lead to more tests, such as a biopsy, even if you don't have cancer.
- Testing may find a cancer that might never have caused problems or caused death.
- Testing may lead to treatment, and treatment can cause side effects. These include problems controlling your urine, problems with your bowels, and/or problems having sex.
- Testing may not find anything even though cancer is there.

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If I do not get tested

What will happen?

- You have regular check-ups but no prostate cancer testing.
- At any time, you can change your mind and be tested.

Possible benefits to you

- You avoid the worry that you might have from getting test results.
- You avoid being treated for a cancer that might never cause you any problems.
- You avoid the side effects that may occur with treatment. These include problems passing urine, problems with your bowels, and/or problems having sex.

Risks to you

- You may be worried that you have prostate cancer and have not been tested.
- You may have an early prostate cancer, and you won't know this.
- You may have a prostate cancer that may later cause symptoms or death and not have the chance to find it early.

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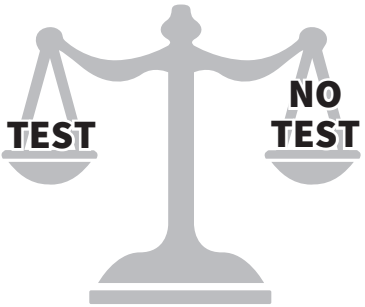
What's important to you?

There are many reasons men decide to be tested or not to be tested for prostate cancer. Some reasons are listed below. Place a check by the reasons that are important to you.



Some reasons *to* be tested

Check what's important to you.	✔
I will have peace of mind when I know the test results.	
My family will know and I will know if I have prostate cancer or not.	
I will have a better chance of getting treatment that could help save my life if cancer is found early.	
I have some of the risk factors that increase my chances of getting prostate cancer.	
Other reasons important to you (list them here):	

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What's important to you?

Some reasons *not* to be tested

Check what's important to you.	✔
I will worry about the test results.	
I might find a prostate cancer that never would have caused me problems or shortened my life.	
I will have to deal with treatment and its side effects.	
I might have a biopsy when I didn't need one.	
Other reasons important to you (list them here):	

Which way are you leaning about being tested?

Want to be tested — **Not sure** — **Do not want to be tested**

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You need to know …

- Prostate cancer affects many men.
- There are tests to help find it early.
- We don't yet know if the benefits of testing outweigh the risks.
- Men should learn about prostate cancer and testing, then decide if testing is the right choice for them. Read this booklet to learn more.

To learn more, visit the American Cancer Society online at **www.cancer.org** or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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