

Understanding Prostate Cancer: What You Need to Know

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men in the UK, particularly in those over 50. Many men will never have symptoms, and for some the cancer grows so slowly that it never causes harm. For others, early detection can make a real difference. This guide explains the key facts, symptoms to look out for, and what to expect if you're considering a PSA test.

What Is Prostate Cancer?

The prostate is a small gland located just below the bladder. Prostate cancer develops when cells in the prostate grow in an uncontrolled way. Some cancers grow very slowly, while others can be more aggressive and need treatment.

How Common Is It?

- Prostate cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in men in the UK.
- Risk increases with age, especially after 50.
- Black men and those with a close family member who has had prostate cancer are at higher risk.

Symptoms to Look Out For

- Needing to urinate more often, especially at night
- Difficulty starting or stopping urination
- A weak urine flow
- Feeling that the bladder hasn't fully emptied
- Blood in urine or semen (less common)

Screening and Tests

There is currently no national screening programme for prostate cancer. This is because the main test available — the PSA blood test — is not accurate enough to be used routinely for everyone.

The PSA Test

- PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) is a protein made by the prostate. A PSA test measures the level of this protein in the blood.
- A raised PSA does not necessarily mean cancer.
- A normal PSA does not completely rule cancer out.
- Your GP will help you understand the benefits and limitations of the test.

Who Might Consider a PSA Test?

- You are over 50
- You are Black
- You have a father or brother who has had prostate cancer

How to Prepare for a PSA Test

Before the Test

- Avoid ejaculation for 48 hours beforehand, as this can temporarily raise PSA levels.
- Avoid vigorous exercise, especially cycling, for 48 hours before the test.
- Tell your GP if you have urinary symptoms or a possible infection — the test may need to be delayed.
- Let your GP know about any medications you take, including those for prostate enlargement.
- If you've recently had a prostate examination, catheter insertion, or biopsy, your GP may advise waiting before doing the test.

On the Day

- You can eat and drink normally.
- The test is taken from a vein in your arm, like any routine blood test.

After the Test

Your GP will contact you with the result and explain what it means. A raised PSA doesn't automatically mean cancer — it simply means further discussion or tests may be needed.

When to Speak to Your GP

If you notice urinary symptoms, have concerns about your risk, or want to discuss whether a PSA test is right for you, please get in touch with the practice. We're here to help you make an informed decision.

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