

# Testing for Prostate Cancer



“Should I  
be tested?  
Is it the  
right choice  
for me?”

THE OFFICIAL SPONSOR OF BIRTHDAYS.®







## **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.

### **Who this booklet is for:**

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

## 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 will be able to talk with your doctor and tell him how you feel about testing. Here we will talk more about prostate cancer testing and the possible benefits and risks of testing.

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

No, we do not for these reasons:

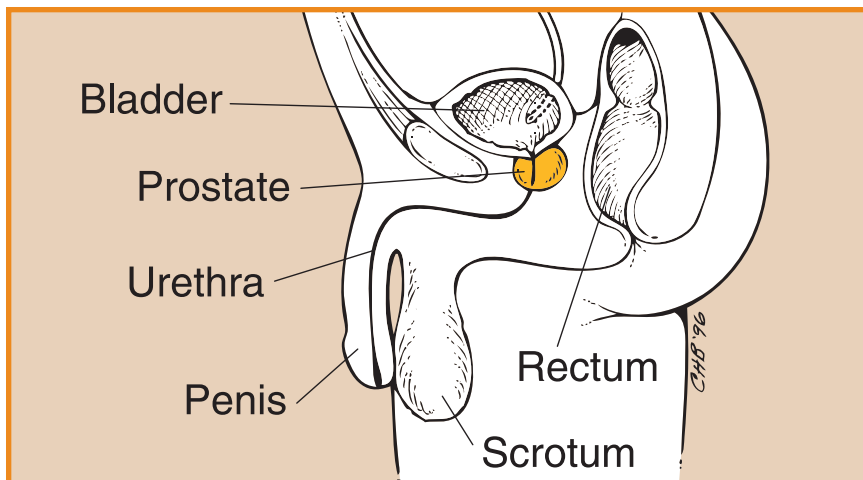
- **The research is not clear.** Some research shows that finding prostate cancer early will stop some men from dying from the disease. Other research does not show this.
- **All prostate cancers are not the same.** Many prostate cancers grow slowly. These do not cause any harm. Some prostate cancers grow fast. They spread to other parts of the body. Here they cause problems and can even cause death. The tests we have today cannot tell us which prostate cancers will cause harm and which ones will not. Therefore, men with slow-growing cancers might get treatment that they do not need.



- **Testing is not perfect**, but the tests are the best we have today. The tests can suggest a cancer is present when one is not there. The tests can also miss a prostate cancer, and the man would 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 treatment side effects include problems controlling your urine, problems with your bowels, and/or problems having sex.

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. 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 do not 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.

## What causes prostate cancer?

We do not 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 factor. The chance of having prostate cancer goes up quickly after age 50. About 2/3 (66%) of prostate cancers occur in men over the age of 65.
- **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 do not know why, but prostate cancer is more common in African American men than in other races.

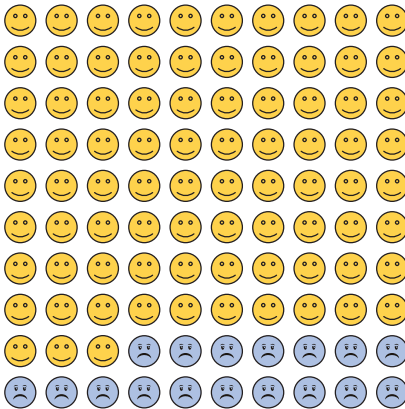
## What if I am having prostate symptoms now?



If you have pain when you pass your 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 is wrong is to see your doctor.

# What are my chances of having prostate cancer?

Based on the way prostate cancer testing is done today, about 17 out of 100 of men (17%) who are now age 50 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their life.

**17 out of 100 men (17%) age 50 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their life.**



 = man **not diagnosed** with prostate cancer  
 = man **with** prostate cancer

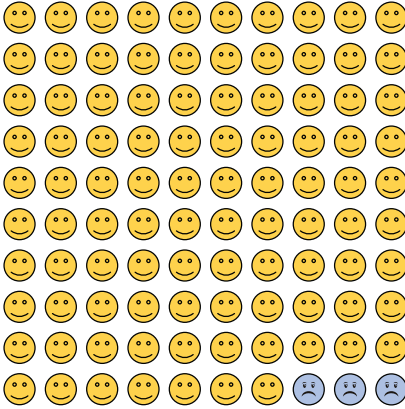
**As you get older, your chance of having prostate cancer goes up. You might also hear it this way – As you get older, your risk for prostate cancer increases.**







About 3 out of 100 men (3%) who are age 50 will some day die of prostate cancer.

**3 out of 100 men (3%) age 50 will some day die of prostate cancer.**



-  = man who **does not die** from prostate cancer
-  = man who **dies** from prostate cancer

## 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?

It is a test that measures how much PSA is in your blood. PSA stands for prostate-specific antigen. It is 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.

## 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 prostate cancer is present. Your chance of having prostate cancer goes up as your PSA level goes up.

PSA levels can be high in prostate cancer, and 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 cancers cannot be felt by rectal exam. But sometimes rectal exams can find cancer even when the PSA level does not suggest cancer.

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



## 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.

**These tests are not perfect tests for finding prostate cancer.**

**You can have prostate cancer and not have any symptoms. But if you have symptoms, please talk to your doctor right away.**

## 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 placed into the prostate gland.
- Many 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.



**The biopsy is done as an outpatient and takes only a few minutes. 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.**

# 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 is small and before it has spread.
- If it is 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 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.
- Your PSA level may be low, even though cancer is there.

## 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 testing.
- 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 your urine, problems with your bowels, and/or problems having sex.

### Risks to you

- 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.

## 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.

## 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 are tested will depend on your PSA level.

## The decision is yours.

### **A common myth about treatment**

You may have heard that cancer will spread if it is exposed to air during surgery. This is not true. Some people may believe this because during surgery the doctor may find more cancer than was expected. Although this can happen, it is not because of the surgery – the cancer was already there – it just did not show up on the tests that were done. Cancer does not spread because it has been exposed to air.

## What is 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 save my life if a 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):

Cut out and take to your doctor.



## What is 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**



## **So remember ...**

Prostate cancer affects many men.

There are tests to 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.

**To learn more, call the American Cancer Society anytime day or night at 1-800-227-2345.**



The American Cancer Society, Inc. adheres to the Better Business Bureau's strong standards for charitable giving.



We **save lives** and create more birthdays by helping you stay well, helping you get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back.

**cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345 | 1.866.228.4327 (TTY)**