

Prostate Cancer

Awareness. Eligibility. Testing.



What is prostate cancer?

Cancer that starts in the prostate gland – a walnut-sized gland under a man’s bladder.

What causes prostate cancer?

Doctors do not yet know what causes prostate cancer, so it cannot be fully prevented. There is some evidence to suggest that being overweight may increase the risk of prostate cancer that’s aggressive (more likely to spread) or advanced (cancer that has spread outside the prostate). Maintaining a healthy weight, eating well and staying physically active may help reduce overall risk.

How common is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in the UK, with around 55,300 new cases diagnosed every year. One in eight men will be affected, and if you are a black man it’s one in four. Since the early 1990s, prostate cancer incidence has increased by 55%, and by 10% in the last decade.

Who can get prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer mainly affects men over 50. The risk is higher if you are a black man. If you have a family history of prostate, breast or ovarian cancer, your risk of developing it may be higher. This is because you may have inherited the same faulty genes that can be associated with these cancers. Trans women, as well as non-binary people assigned male at birth, can get prostate cancer.

Is there a test for prostate cancer?

Yes, there are a number of tests to check for prostate cancer. These include a digital rectal examination, a PSA (prostate specific antigen) blood test and scans. Someone might also have a sample of cells taken from their prostate for testing, known as a biopsy.

Who is eligible for testing?

Currently, only those with BRCA gene variations are offered routine PSA testing by the NHS. However, anyone over 50, who has concerns about prostate cancer or has a family history of prostate cancer, can request a free test from their GP.

Why isn't everyone offered testing?

The PSA test measures the level of PSA in the blood. However, not all prostates release the same amount of PSA. So a raised PSA level can find prostate cancer at an early stage for some individuals, but suggest others have prostate cancer when they don't. The PSA test also can't reliably distinguish between aggressive disease that requires treatment and low-risk cancer that doesn't.

< 10%

correctly identified that prostate cancer typically has no symptoms in the early stages.

52–62%

of men aged 35–55+ worry about getting prostate cancer in the future.

40%

of men say they would be more likely to attend screening with virtual support.

What happens during a digital rectal examination?

If you decide with your GP to go ahead with prostate testing, your doctor might recommend a rectal examination to check the health of the prostate.

- You'll be asked to undress from the waist down and (usually) be asked to lie on your left side, with your knees pulled up towards your chest.
- The nurse or doctor will gently put one finger inside your back passage (rectum). They'll wear gloves and they'll put a lubricating gel on their finger to make it more comfortable.
- They'll carefully feel the inside of your anus and rectum.

The test may feel uncomfortable, but it shouldn't be painful. You can request a male doctor or nurse, and take someone with you for support.



What are the signs or symptoms to be aware of?



Symptoms of prostate cancer do not usually appear until the prostate is large enough to affect the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the penis, the urethra. This can change the way you urinate, causing the following symptoms:

- Difficulty starting to urinate or emptying your bladder
- A weak flow when you urinate
- A feeling that your bladder hasn't emptied properly
- Dribbling urine after you finish urinating
- Urinating more often than usual, especially at night
- A sudden need to urinate – you may sometimes leak urine before you get to the toilet

If prostate cancer breaks out of the prostate or spreads to other parts of the body, it can cause other symptoms, including:

- Back pain, hip pain or pelvic pain
- Problems getting or keeping an erection
- Blood in the urine or semen
- Unexplained weight loss

What should you do if you have these symptoms?

Noticing changes to the way you urinate is most likely to be a sign of an enlarged prostate or other health problems not related to cancer. However, if you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it's important to talk to your GP, who may refer you to a specialist for more tests.

What should you do if you don't have symptoms but want more information?

The NHS Prostate Cancer Risk Management Programme (PCRMP) aims to provide reliable information for healthy men over 50 who do not have symptoms, including the pros and cons of PSA testing. You can download it [here](#).

Whole Human Cancer Care, from Risk to Recovery.