

Prostate cancer



Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and becomes more common with age. It is a malignant growth within the prostate, a gland positioned below the bladder that produces a fluid to nourish sperm.

Prostate cancer is potentially life-threatening, so early detection and treatment is essential to stop the cancer spreading. Almost 1 in 11 men will develop prostate cancer during his lifetime.

Prostate cancer is caused by some of the cells of the prostate reproducing far more rapidly than in a normal prostate, causing swelling or a tumour.

Unlike benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) (enlargement of the prostate), prostate cancer cells eventually break out of the prostate and invade distant parts of the body, particularly the bones and lymph nodes, producing secondary tumours. Once the cancer moves out of the prostate, treatment is possible but a cure becomes impossible.

Prostate cancer is usually one of the slower-growing cancers, and in the past it was most frequently encountered in men over 70. Men of a younger age, in their mid-40s, are now also being diagnosed with prostate cancer. The combination of the earlier on-set and the longer life expectancy for men means prostate cancer has more time to spread and become life threatening within a shorter period of time.

Provided appropriate treatment commences while the cancer is still confined to the prostate gland, it is possible to cure it. The possibility of cure is the main reason why early diagnosis is critical. All men should be aware of their risk

of the disease and consider being tested for it regularly from age 45 onwards, especially if there is a history of prostate cancer in the family.

There are a wide range of symptoms which could indicate problems with the prostate, but they could also be symptoms of bladder or other urinary difficulties, so it's best to have any symptoms checked out by a doctor. One of the main tests for prostate cancer involves a simple blood test called prostate-specific antigen or PSA, which searches the blood for the presence of a protein that is produced by prostate cells.

If your test reveals a slightly elevated PSA, your doctor may recommend the test be repeated from time to time to establish the rate of change, if any, before recommending a biopsy.

The other test, even if your PSA levels is normal, is the DRE or digital rectal examination. The doctor will perform a gloved rectal examination, where it is possible to feel part of the surface of the prostate. Any irregularities, like swelling or hardening of the prostate, lumps on the surface that indicate development of a tumour, or other problems can be identified this way. If anything seems abnormal, further blood tests and an ultrasound may be ordered.

All men over 45 should think about regular check-ups with the doctor to make sure everything is okay.