

# What you need to know about prostate cancer



Prostate Cancer  
Foundation of Australia

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## What is prostate disease?

Different diseases can affect the prostate gland. These are more common as you age. About half of all men will have a prostate condition by the age of 70.

Prostate disease most commonly causes urinary symptoms such as difficulty urinating, the urge to urinate more often, painful urination, or feeling like you can't fully empty your bladder.

**Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) or enlarged prostate:** This is a common condition that happens when the prostate grows larger with age. It can affect urination. It is treated with medications or surgery.

**Prostatitis (infection or inflammation):** Prostatitis is when the prostate gland becomes inflamed and sore. It can be very painful and causes more frequent urination. It can be treated with antibiotics, other medications or surgery.

## What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer happens when abnormal cells develop and grow in the prostate. These abnormal cells can continue to multiply in an uncontrolled way and sometimes spread outside the prostate into nearby or distant parts of the body.

In most men, prostate cancer is a slow growing disease. If it stays inside the prostate gland and grows slowly, it may never cause a problem.

However, in some men the cancer may grow more quickly and can cause problems that can impact on their life expectancy.

When the cancer cells spread outside of the prostate to other parts of the body, it is known as advanced or metastatic prostate cancer.

## Who gets prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australian men, with about 25,000 men newly diagnosed each year. More than 3700 Australian men die from prostate cancer each year.

Prostate cancer has one of the highest survival rates of all cancers, with 95% of men likely to survive five years or more. About 250,000 Australian men are alive today after a diagnosis of prostate cancer.

### **There are two proven risk factors that may increase the chance of developing prostate cancer:**

**Age:** The risk of developing prostate cancer increases with age. The risk of getting prostate cancer by the age of 75 is 1 in 7 men. By the age of 85, this increases to 1 in 6 men.

**Family history:** You have a higher chance of developing prostate cancer if you have a father, brother or son who has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. The risk increases again if more than one close relative has prostate cancer. Risks are also higher for men whose relatives were diagnosed when young. A family history of other cancers, like breast and ovarian cancers, may also increase your risk of getting prostate cancer.

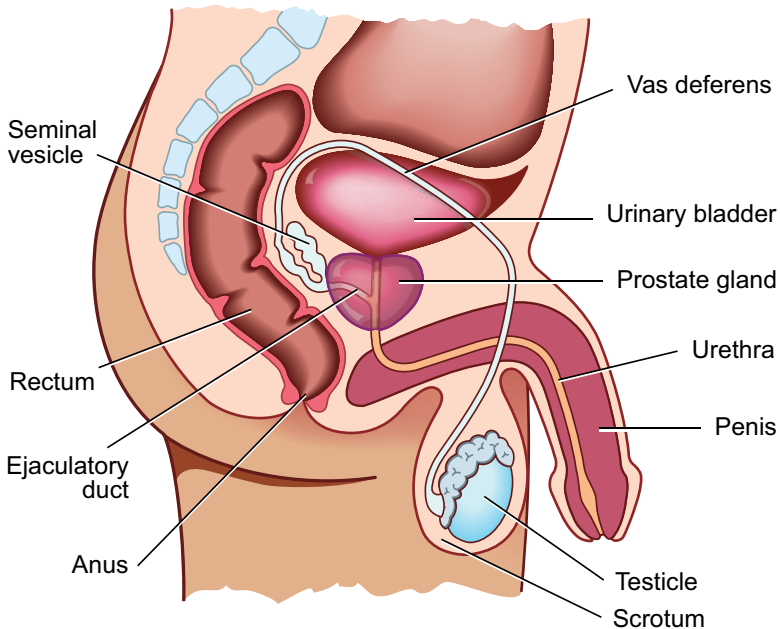
## What is the prostate?

The prostate is a small gland located below the bladder and in front of the rectum in men. It surrounds the urethra, the passage that leads from the bladder, out through the penis through which urine and semen pass out of the body.

The prostate gland is part of the male reproductive system. It produces some of the fluid that makes up semen, which enriches and protects sperm. The prostate needs the male hormone testosterone to grow and develop. Testosterone is made by the testicles.

In an adult, the prostate gland is usually about the size of a walnut and it is normal for it to grow larger as men age. Sometimes this can cause problems, such as difficulty with passing urine.

### The male reproductive system



## What are the symptoms of prostate cancer?

In the early stages of prostate cancer, there may be no symptoms. In the later stages, some symptoms might include:

- feeling the frequent or sudden need to urinate
- finding it difficult to urinate (for example, trouble starting or not being able to urinate when the feeling is there or poor urine flow)
- discomfort when urinating
- finding blood in urine or semen
- pain in the lower back, upper thighs or hips.

Many of these symptoms are common. They may not mean you have prostate cancer. But if you are worried about your symptoms, it is important that you talk to your doctor.

## How is prostate cancer diagnosed?

A doctor will usually do a PSA blood test and may do a physical examination and/or organise a MRI scan to check the health of the prostate. If these tests indicate a possibility of prostate cancer, you may need a biopsy.

### **Prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test**

PSA is a protein that is produced by the prostate gland. Higher than normal PSA levels can indicate prostate cancer. However, a high PSA test result does not necessarily mean cancer because other prostate conditions can also raise PSA levels.

### **Digital rectal examination (DRE)**

A doctor can feel the size and shape of the prostate gland by inserting a gloved, lubricated finger into the patient's rectum. Sometimes a prostate cancer can be felt this way, but a normal DRE result does not necessarily rule out prostate cancer.

### **Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan**

An MRI is a scan to assess the size of the prostate and look for any abnormal areas. It is performed as an outpatient procedure (you do not need to be admitted to a hospital). You will lie on a special bed that passes through a narrow tunnel while the scans are being taken. If you have issues with claustrophobia, you may require sedation for this scan. If you have any metallic implants (e.g. screws or plates) in your body or medical devices (e.g. pacemaker, cochlear implant), or if you have had joint surgery, it is important that you tell your doctor.

### **Biopsy**

A biopsy is a procedure where a needle is used to remove multiple small samples of tissue from the prostate gland. The samples are sent to a laboratory to be examined. This shows whether the cells in the prostate are malignant (cancerous) or benign (non-cancerous). A biopsy is the only way a definitive diagnosis of prostate cancer can be made.

## How is prostate cancer treated?

There are many different treatments available for prostate cancer. The type of treatment given will depend on your PSA result, the grade and stage of your cancer (how fast it is growing and how far it has spread outside of the prostate), your symptoms, your overall health and your personal preferences.

If there is a low risk that your prostate cancer will cause you harm, you may be offered Active Surveillance. This involves regular testing to check for any changes to the cancer. If the cancer changes, you may need treatment.

If your cancer is higher risk, you will be offered treatment. Different treatments come with differing side effects some of which include urinary problems, erection and ejaculation problems, bowel problems, fatigue, depression and anxiety.

You may need to meet with several different cancer specialists such as a urologist, radiation oncologist and/or medical oncologist to discuss your treatment options.

More information can be found in *Prostate cancer – a guide for newly-diagnosed men* downloadable [pcfa.org.au](http://pcfa.org.au).

### Should I have a PSA test?

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Men over age 50, or 40 with a family history of prostate cancer, should talk to their doctor about testing for prostate cancer using the PSA test as part of their regular health check-up.

Men should make an informed decision about testing based on the latest available evidence on the benefits and potential harms of testing and subsequent treatment for prostate cancer.

More information on PSA testing can be found at [pcfa.org.au](http://pcfa.org.au).

## For more information and support you can:

**Contact us:** PCFA is here to help. Call us on **1800 22 00 99** or email us on **enquiries@pcfa.org.au**

**Find out more:** PCFA has a range of evidence-based sources for men with prostate cancer and their families. Visit: **pcfa.org.au**

**Prostate Cancer Counselling Service:** Call us on **1800 22 00 99** and talk to one of our Prostate Cancer Specialist Nurses about a referral to our free Prostate Cancer Counselling Service.

**Join a support group:** Support groups around the country bring together men and women affected by prostate cancer. To find a support group, visit: **pcfa.org.au/support/find-a-support-group**

### For more information on prostate cancer visit:

**Cancer Australia:** [www.canceraustralia.gov.au/affected-cancer/cancer-types/prostate-cancer](http://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/affected-cancer/cancer-types/prostate-cancer)

**Cancer Council Australia:** [cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/prostate-cancer](http://cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/prostate-cancer)

**Healthy Male Andrology Australia:** [healthymale.org.au/mens-health/prostate-cancer](http://healthymale.org.au/mens-health/prostate-cancer)

### For further support contact:

**MensLine Australia:** [mensline.org.au](http://mensline.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

**Lifeline Australia:** [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

### Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia (PCFA)

We are Australia's leading community-based organisation for prostate cancer research, awareness, and support. As the nation's predominant charity fund for Australian-based prostate cancer research, we exist to protect the health of existing and future generations of men in Australia and to improve quality of life for Australian men and families impacted by prostate cancer.

Our vision is a future where no man dies of prostate cancer and Australian men and their families get the support they need.

For further information or to make a donation, please contact us on:

**1800 22 00 99** (toll free) or visit: **pcfa.org.au**



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