

# Prostate Cancer

**Prostate cancer** is defined as the growth of malignant cells in the prostate gland, and many prostate cancers grow very slowly and never cause symptoms or spread. Other than skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer in men in the United States. Prostate cancer is second only to lung cancer as the leading cause of death in men. Of all the men who are diagnosed with cancer each year, more than one-fourth has prostate cancer. However, prostate cancer is often curable with early detection.

## What is the prostate gland?

The prostate is a gland in a man's reproductive system. It is about the size of a walnut and is located below the bladder and in front of the rectum. The urethra, which is the tube that carries urine, runs through the prostate. The prostate gland helps control urination by pressing directly against the urethra. If the prostate grows too large, the flow of urine can be slowed or stopped. Also, the prostate gland makes and stores seminal fluid, which transports sperm.

## Risk Factors for Prostate Cancer

- **Age:** The chance of getting prostate cancer goes up as a man gets older.
- **Race:** Prostate cancer is more common among African-American men than among Caucasian men.
- **Nationality:** Prostate cancer is most common in North America and northwestern Europe.
- **Diet:** A diet high in fat may play a part in causing prostate cancer.
- **Physical Activity:** Regular physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight may help reduce prostate cancer risk.
- **Family History:** Men with close family members who have had prostate cancer are more likely to get it themselves.

## Signs and Symptoms of Prostate Cancer:

- Early stages of prostate cancer may cause no symptoms
- Weak urinary stream
- Difficulty starting urination
- Interruption of the stream (starting and stopping)
- Pain or burning during urination
- Urgency (difficulty postponing urination)
- Frequent urination
- Awakening frequently at night to urinate
- Blood in urine
- Trouble having or keeping an erection
- Pain in the pelvis, spine, hips, or ribs

## Early Detection of Prostate Cancer:

- **Beginning at age 40**, routine yearly digital rectal examinations should be conducted.
- **Beginning at age 50**, all men who have at least a 10-year life expectancy should be offered both the **PSA blood test** and a **digital rectal exam** annually.
- Men should receive information regarding possible risks and benefits of finding and treating prostate cancer early. Men should not be discouraged from testing.
- Since early stages of prostate cancer may cause no symptoms, regular checkups are very important.

## Detecting Prostate Cancer:

- **PSA Blood Test:** This test measures a protein named **prostate specific antigen**, which is made by the prostate cells. The higher the PSA level, the more likely the chance of prostate cancer. But PSA alone does not tell whether a man has prostate cancer because the high levels can be caused by other conditions. Men with a high PSA will need further tests to find out if they actually have cancer.
- **Digital Rectal Exam (DRE):** During this exam, the doctor inserts a gloved, lubricated finger into the man's rectum to feel for any irregular or abnormally firm area that might be cancer. While it is uncomfortable, the exam is not painful and takes only a short time.

## Prevention of Prostate Cancer:

No specific measures are known to prevent the development of prostate cancer. At present, therefore, we can hope only to prevent progression of the cancer by making early diagnoses and then attempting to cure the disease. Early diagnoses can be made by screening men for prostate cancer. Screening is done, as mentioned previously, by routine yearly digital rectal examinations beginning at age 40 and the addition of an annual PSA test beginning at age 50. The purpose of the screening is to detect early, tiny, or even microscopic cancers that are confined to the prostate gland. Early treatment of these malignancies (cancers) can stop the growth, prevent the spread, and possibly cure the cancer.

A diet low in animal fat and high in vegetables, fruits, and grains may help to prevent prostate cancer. Also, tomatoes, grapefruit, and watermelon are rich in lycopenes, which is a substance that may help lower prostate cancer risk

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