

prostate cancer

protect yourself: know the facts

What is prostate cancer?

The prostate is a gland found in men. It is about the size of a walnut and found near the bladder and rectum. Prostate cancer begins when cells that are not normal grow inside the prostate. After skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men.

What are the symptoms?

A man with prostate cancer may not have any symptoms. When symptoms are present, some common ones are:

- Problems with urination
- Difficulty having an erection
- Blood in the urine or semen
- Frequent pain in the lower back, hips, or upper thighs

Often, these symptoms are caused by less serious conditions. However, men who have any of these problems should tell their doctor.

How can prostate cancer be found?

There is no standard or routine screening test for prostate cancer, however, there are two common tests used. They are:

- Prostate specific antigen (PSA) test: PSA is a protein produced by the prostate gland. The PSA test measures the amount of this protein in the blood. A high level may mean cancer, but it also may be caused by less serious conditions, certain drugs, and simply getting older.
- Digital rectal exam (DRE): In a DRE the doctor feels inside the rectum for hard or lumpy areas on the prostate.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends against prostate specific antigen (PSA) screening for prostate cancer. This test does not distinguish between malignant and benign tumors, resulting in many men having unnecessary biopsies, operations and radiation treatments. However, even though PSA tests are not recommended as a screening for prostate cancer, they are still often used.



How reliable are the results of prostate cancer screening tests?

Researchers do not agree on this question. The tests are not perfect and confusing results can cause unnecessary worry or follow-up procedures. The PSA can find cancers that present no risk to a man's health, and treatment for these cancers can cause side effects that reduce a man's quality of life, such as impotence and urinary and fecal incontinence.

So what should men do?

The decision to be screened for prostate cancer is a personal one. Things to consider are age, race, overall health, and the man's personal chance of getting the disease. Also, some prostate cancers grow so slowly that they might not affect a man's health. Prostate cancer can be a serious disease, but most men diagnosed with this cancer do not die from it. Therefore, it is important to talk with your doctor about the pros and cons of prostate cancer screening and whether it is right for you.

What increases a man's chance of getting prostate cancer?

The exact cause of prostate cancer is not known, so it is not possible to prevent most cases of the disease. Risk factors for prostate cancer include:

- Being 50 years of age or older.
- Being African American.
- Having a brother, son or father who had prostate cancer.

Where can I get more information?

KCP's online tool, **Pathfinder**, can link you to cancer support and services nearest you. Visit www.kycancerprogram.org to find cancer resources in your community, or to contact your local **Kentucky Cancer Program** office.

For information on all types of cancer, contact:

- **National Cancer Institute, 1-800-4-CANCER, www.cancer.gov**
- **American Cancer Society, 1-800-ACS-2345, www.cancer.org**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov**

This fact sheet was developed by the Kentucky Cancer Program at the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center. The information comes from the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Last reviewed March 2018

www.kycancerprogram.org

The Kentucky Cancer Program is jointly administered by the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center and the University of Louisville Brown Cancer Center.

