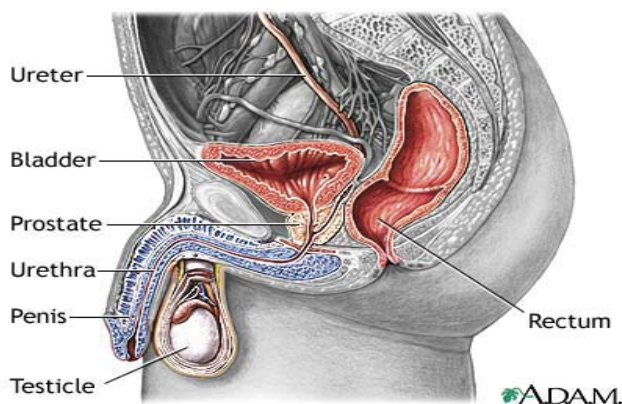


# Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) Testing for Prostate Cancer

The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test is a blood test used in combination with other information to screen for prostate cancer. Many men have the test and a digital rectal examination as part of their regular check-up. But experts disagree on whether PSA testing is right for everyone. If you're thinking about having a PSA test, talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits.

## Prostate Cancer

- Prostate cancer is a disease where cancer develops in the prostate gland.
- It is the most common cancer in men.
- The prostate is a walnut sized gland located under the bladder.
- Unlike many other cancers, prostate cancer is usually slow growing.
- Most men who have prostate cancer die with it, but not from it.
- In its early stages, prostate cancer does not usually cause any signs or symptoms.
- An early diagnosis (before the cancer has spread beyond the prostate gland) increases the chance that it may be cured with radiation or surgery.
- As prostate cancer grows or spreads, symptoms such as urinary problems (blood in the urine) and bone pain may develop.



## What is a PSA test?

The prostate gland produces a substance called **prostate specific antigen (PSA)**. A PSA test is a blood test that measures your PSA level. It is normal for men to have a small amount of PSA in the blood. However, a high PSA level could indicate that a patient has a prostate problem such as infection, inflammation, enlargement or cancer.

### PSA levels may rise because of:

- **Age** - Your PSA level goes up as you get older.
- **Infection** - A urinary infection should be treated before you have a PSA test.
- **Sexual activity** - Ejaculating can cause your PSA level to rise.
- **BPH (benign prostatic hyperplasia)** - The prostate gland may become enlarged even if it is non-cancerous.
- **Prostatitis** - The prostate gland is inflamed.
- **Prostate Cancer** - However, some men with early stage prostate cancer may not have an elevated PSA.
- **Vigorous exercise** - Activity such as a long bike ride may cause trauma to the prostate gland.
- **Digital rectal examination (DRE)** - The PSA test should be done before a DRE.
- **Biopsy** - A biopsy six weeks before a PSA test may affect the test results.
- **Medication** - Prescription drugs and supplements may help lower your PSA level. Tell your doctor about medication or supplements you're taking before having a PSA test.

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## Risks of PSA screening:

- If your PSA is high, you may need other tests to screen for cancer. Further tests often show that a high PSA is not caused by cancer.
- PSA tests have a high rate of “false positive” results. This means the test results show cancer, even though no cancer is actually present.
- The test can also show a “false negative” result. This means no cancer is detected, even if cancer is present.
- Your next option may be having a biopsy. If it detects cancer, you will have to discuss treatment options with your doctor.
- Treatment for prostate cancer can cause serious side effects.
- Prostate cancer usually grows slowly. In some cases, it never affects a man’s health.

## Benefits of PSA screening:

- If found early, prostate cancer may be curable.
- If you have a family history of prostate cancer, your risk of getting it is higher.
- Having a normal PSA test can be reassuring.
- Prostate cancer can grow or spread quickly. If not treated, it could be fatal.

## What do experts say about PSA testing?

- Experts disagree about whether men over 50 should have regular PSA tests.
- Some experts agree that men should be told about the risks and benefits of PSA testing so they can make their own decisions.
- The Canadian Task Force on Preventative Health Care advises against PSA screening.
- The Canadian Cancer Society advises men over 50 to discuss the pros and cons of testing with their doctors. Men with a family history of prostate cancer or black men may wish to ask about testing at a younger age.

- The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force does not recommend for or against routine PSA testing because of lack of evidence.
- The World Health Organization says it is unclear whether PSA screening for prostate cancer reduces the number of deaths from the disease.
- The United Kingdom National Health Services says that evidence does not yet support screening for prostate cancer.

## Does PSA testing save lives?

- If you have symptoms, a PSA test can be important in diagnosing cancer.
- Research does not show that the PSA test is a reliable screening tool for prostate cancer.
- Some studies have compared two groups of men: one group who had regular PSA tests and another group who did not. The results of the studies have not shown a difference in the death rates of these two groups of men.
- There is no strong evidence that screening men without symptoms reduces the death rate from prostate cancer.

## Making Your Decision

### Before deciding to have a PSA test now, later, or not at all:

- Give yourself time to make an informed decision.
- Talk to your spouse, partner or members of your family.
- Talk to your doctor. Bring this information with you.
- Consider the option that’s best for you.



# Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) Testing for Prostate Cancer

## Pros and Cons to help you decide:

| Pros   | Cons  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PSA testing can detect prostate cancer in its early stages while it may be curable.</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biopsy/treatment may cause needless anxiety, because prostate cancer is slow growing and you may never have any symptoms.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undetected prostate cancer may spread quickly. Prostate cancer can be fatal if it spreads.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PSA testing is not always conclusive. Further tests may be needed.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy men over 50 may benefit from screening and treatment of prostate cancer.</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A PSA test could lead to difficult decisions about more testing and treatment.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routine PSA testing over several years may help monitor any changes in your PSA level.</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cancer treatment can cause serious side effects such as loss of bladder control and erectile dysfunction.</li> </ul>                 |

The table below may help you decide whether to have a PSA test. Circle the answer that best applies to you.

|   |     |    |                      |
|---|-----|----|----------------------|
| I am a healthy 50-year-old and would like to know if I have prostate cancer.  | Yes | No | Does not apply to me |
| Prostate cancer is usually slow growing and may not become serious in my lifetime. I don't need to know whether I have prostate cancer. | Yes | No | Undecided            |
| I have some health problems already. I'm not sure if I'd want to pursue cancer testing and treatment.                                   | Yes | No | Undecided            |
| I need to know if I have cancer, even if it is in the early stages and not causing any symptoms.  | Yes | No | Undecided            |
| I have an enlarged prostate and know that my PSA levels are higher than normal. So, a PSA test may not be an accurate test for me.      | Yes | No | Does not apply to me |
| I worry about the urinary and erection problems associated with prostate cancer treatment.  | Yes | No | Undecided            |
| There's a history of prostate cancer in my family, and I feel that a PSA test is the best option for me.                                | Yes | No | Does not apply to me |
| If my PSA is high, I am not prepared to have more tests to see whether I have prostate cancer.  | Yes | No | Undecided            |



# Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) Testing for Prostate Cancer

Write down your thoughts or concerns.

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Mark your overall feelings about having a PSA test on the scale below:

In favour of having a PSA test

Not in favour of having a PSA test

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

