



Canadian
Cancer
Society



Should I get tested for prostate cancer?



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Should I get tested for prostate cancer?

When prostate cancer is found and treated early, the chances of successful treatment are better. There are 2 tests available to help detect prostate cancer early: the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test and a digital rectal exam (DRE). Using these tests together is better than using either test alone. Talk to your healthcare provider to help decide if the tests are right for you.



Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test

The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test is a simple blood test. It measures the amount of PSA (a protein made by the prostate cells) in the blood. PSA is mostly found in semen, but small amounts of it can also be found in the blood. Higher levels of PSA in the blood can be caused by prostate cancer or by other conditions of the prostate. The PSA test cannot diagnose cancer, but it can indicate if there is a problem with the prostate.

Should I get the PSA test?

Make an informed decision about whether the PSA test is right for you by talking with your healthcare provider and considering your risk.

- If you are at average risk of developing prostate cancer, consider testing from age 50.
- If you are at high risk, consider testing from age 45. Black men (including men of African or Caribbean ancestry) and those with a family history of prostate cancer are considered to be at high risk.

What is a normal PSA level?

Most labs consider a normal PSA level to be around 4 ng/mL. But PSA levels vary by age, and they go up naturally as you get older. They can also go up and down for other reasons. Talk to your healthcare provider about your PSA test results and what they mean for you.

What does it mean if my PSA level is high?

What happens then?

High PSA levels can be a sign of a problem with your prostate, but that doesn't mean that you have prostate cancer. High PSA levels can also be caused by:

- an enlarged prostate (benign prostatic hyperplasia)
- inflammation or infection of the prostate (prostatitis)
- a urinary tract infection
- a recent medical test or procedure on the prostate, such as a transrectal ultrasound or biopsy
- a urinary catheter
- a bladder exam
- sexual activity that includes ejaculation
- bike riding often or a recent long bike ride
- warmer climates

If you have high PSA levels or your healthcare provider feels a lump on your prostate during a DRE, they will talk to you about your options. Together you can decide if you need other tests, procedures, follow-up care or treatment, such as:

- seeing a specialist
- having urine tests or imaging tests
- having a biopsy (a tissue sample is taken from the prostate for testing)



If I choose to get the PSA test, how often should I get tested?

Your PSA levels will determine how often you get tested. The decision to stop testing is based on your PSA levels, age and general health.

What are the benefits and limitations of the PSA test?

No medical test is perfect. Before having any test, it's important to be aware of benefits and limitations so that you're making an informed decision that's right for you.

BENEFITS

- PSA testing reassures you if the result is normal.
- If the result is higher than what is normal for your age, it tells you that you need further testing.
- PSA testing may help find prostate cancer early before you have symptoms.
- PSA testing may help find cancer before it spreads beyond the prostate when it is easier to treat.

LIMITATIONS

- Sometimes the PSA test suggests you have prostate cancer when you don't (called a false positive).
 - The PSA test may not detect cancer even if you have it (called a false negative).
 - PSA testing can't tell how dangerous the prostate cancer is.
 - PSA testing may find a type of prostate cancer that grows slowly and may never cause problems or need treatment (called overdiagnosis).
 - PSA testing may lead to unnecessary treatment that can have side effects.
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Digital rectal exam (DRE)

A digital rectal exam (DRE) is a physical exam of the prostate through the rectum. The healthcare provider inserts a gloved finger into the rectum to feel the prostate for lumps or anything else that seems unusual.

Risks for prostate cancer

There is no single cause of prostate cancer. But the following can increase your risk. Most of these risks cannot be changed.

Age

The risk for prostate cancer increases as you get older. The chance of getting prostate cancer is greater after age 50, and most prostate cancers are found in men in their 60s.

Family history

Your risk of prostate cancer is increased if close family members have had the disease. The risk is higher if close family members were diagnosed before the age of 65.

Black ethnicity

Black men (including men of African or Caribbean ancestry) are more likely to develop prostate cancer. Black men are also more likely to have prostate tumours that grow and spread quickly and more likely to die from prostate cancer compared to other men.

Weight

Having obesity or overweight makes it more likely that the cancer will be diagnosed at a later stage. High body fat is also linked with a higher risk of developing prostate cancer that grows and spreads quicker.

Height

Being tall increases the risk of prostate cancer.

Inherited gene mutations

Having certain gene mutations, such as HOXB13 and BRCA2, increases the risk of prostate cancer.

It's still possible to develop prostate cancer even if you don't have any of these risks. Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk and whether you should get tested.

To learn more about prostate cancer, visit cancer.ca/prostate.

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Visit cancer.ca for information on more than 100 cancer types. We also have publications, videos and webinars.



Get answers to your questions

Call us at 1-888-939-3333. Our Cancer Information Helpline is available in English and French with an interpreter service for other languages.



Connect with someone who's been there

Visit CancerConnection.ca to join our moderated online community, a safe place to connect, learn and share your experience with cancer.



Find services in your community

Our Community Services Locator (CSL) helps you find the cancer-related services you need. Start your search at cancer.ca/csl.

The Canadian Cancer Society works tirelessly to save and improve lives. We raise funds to fuel the brightest minds in cancer research. We provide a compassionate support system for all those affected by cancer, across Canada and for all types of cancer. Together with patients, supporters, donors and volunteers, we work to create a healthier future for everyone.

Because to take on cancer, it takes all of us. It takes a society.



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