

Prostate Cancer

– the invisible threat



Prostate cancer has no symptoms in its early stages. There's only one thing you can do to catch it before it spreads – see your doctor for regular checks. Early detection is everything.

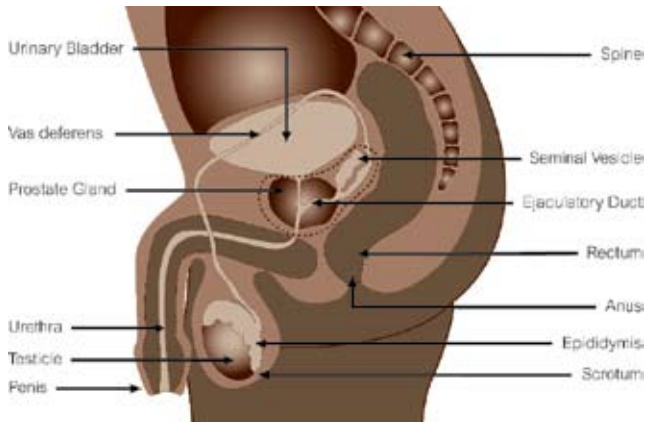
You may be surprised to know that statistics for prostate cancer are similar to those for breast cancer. In Australia each year, 12,000-plus new cases of prostate cancer are diagnosed and 2700 men die of the condition.

The risk of developing prostate cancer increases with age. As you get older, it's common for the prostate gland to enlarge. This can cause urinary problems, which are most often due to Benign Prostatic Enlargement (BPE), not cancer. A prostate cancer that continues to grow may cause urinary problems, too, as it begins to block urine flow, and may also cause other issues, such as

- pain on ejaculation
- blood in the urine or in semen
- persistent pain in the lower back, hips or upper thighs.

Men who have had a father or brother with prostate cancer are at increased risk of developing the disease. This risk increases if more than one member of a man's family has been diagnosed, especially at a younger age.

There is no population-based screening program for prostate cancer. If you are over 50, you need to be tested once a year. Discuss if you may be at risk, as well as the pros and cons of having a prostate check, with your GP.



What if it's a yes?

Research has shown that the number of men with prostate cancer who survive 10 years has increased significantly over the last 20 years and that men diagnosed with prostate cancer have one of the highest survival rates of all the major cancers.

If, after a series of tests, including a Digital Rectal Examination (DRE), a blood test and a biopsy, your results are positive, you will receive a 'Gleason grade', which indicates the cancer's potential to spread and threaten your life.

Those with localised prostate cancer will be given three main treatment options:

- **Surgery:** radical prostatectomy, in which the gland and possibly all of the cancer is removed.
- **Radiation therapy,** which may also kill cancer that has spread just outside the prostate gland. One type is called brachytherapy, which involves treating the cancer by radiation therapy delivered from radioactive 'seeds' planted within the prostate.
- **Watchful waiting:** no active treatment just now but continue to have regular check-ups.

Each treatment has pros and cons and it is important to consider your personal preferences and the possible effects of treatment on your quality of life before making a decision.

If the cancer has moved outside of the prostate gland to other parts of the body, it is known as advanced prostate cancer. The most common treatment for this is hormone manipulation therapy. Most prostate cancers need testosterone to grow and so doctors try to stop the production of testosterone or to block movement of testosterone into the cancer cells.

Hormone therapy is not a cure for prostate cancer but it can successfully stop its growth and development for many years. Ask your specialist about side effects of any treatment. Some men with advanced prostate cancer may also be interested in participating in clinical trials, used to study the safety and benefit of new treatments.

Questions to ask your doctor

- How advanced is my cancer?
- What are the potential side effects of each treatment?
- How will these be managed?
- What can I do to prepare for treatment?
- What will happen if I decide to have no treatment?
- What is the doctor's experience in treating prostate cancer?
- Will my age and general health affect my treatment and recovery?
- How can I help my recovery?
- Should other family members be tested and when?
- Who can I see for a second opinion?

→ MORE

The **Cancer Council Queensland** raises funds for research, treatment and patient care with the aim of eliminating cancer and diminishing patient suffering.
Web www.qldcancer.com.au

The **Cancer Helpline** offers support, information and patient resources. Ph 13 11 20

Prostate cancer support groups meet locally across Australia. Ph 1800 22 00 99 Web www.prostate.org.au

Other useful websites are:
www.prostatehealth.org.au
www.andrologyaustralia.org
www.prostate.org.au

David's story

At age 51, David Sandoe was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

"I was one of the lucky ones – the cancer hadn't yet escaped the prostate gland. If, like me, you are diagnosed early enough, you probably won't be aware that you have cancer. Mine was only picked up because I went for a routine medical check. The first time I realised anything was wrong was when the doctor told me the Digital Rectal Examination (DRE) revealed abnormalities and the blood test revealed a higher than normal reading. I then had to progress to the more invasive test – the biopsy.

"Like many blokes I was apprehensive about this type of test but I realised I had to 'be a man' – now part of the slogan for the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia (PCFA) – and just get on with it.

"The biopsy confirmed that I really did have cancer. Because we had found it early, my best treatment option was also the most aggressive: a radical prostatectomy to remove the whole prostate. Many men find the possible side-effects (loss of erectile function and/or incontinence) so daunting that they defer having the treatment and risk the cancer spreading. My wife and I decided that having me alive was more important than any side-effects and we would deal with those issues later.

"The operation went well: the surgeon removed every scrap of cancer and I've now been cancer-free for 10 years.

"My experience has prompted us to get involved with the PCFA and to lead our local prostate cancer support group. Pam and I spend time each week talking to newly-diagnosed men and their wives/partners, offering counselling on treatment options, recovery and side effects.

"We want people to know that early detection means prostate cancer is often treatable. That means being tested every year from age 50, or, if there's a family history of the disease, from age 40. The tests are much less invasive than the mammograms and Pap smears for women. I wish someone had told me or that my father had indicated if he knew of anyone in the family who'd had prostate cancer. My two sons will definitely be tested from age 40.

"There is much more information around now than there was 10 years ago. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your urologist and push every boundary until you are satisfied. Men need to have confidence in their choice of medical specialists.

"My wife Pam has been my biggest support throughout my cancer journey. Our three adult children, friends and close work colleagues have also been very supportive. We would not wish anyone to go through the experience but I can say our lives have been enriched and we now value, even more, every single day."

In 2006, David and his wife Pam were each awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for their service to men with prostate cancer and their families.



David Sandoe and granddaughter, Georgia