



Prostate cancer: English

This information is about how prostate cancer is diagnosed and treated.

If you have any questions about this information, ask your cancer team at the hospital where you are having treatment.

You can also call Macmillan Cancer Support on freephone **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your own language. When you call us, please tell us in English which language you need.

There is more cancer information in this language on our website. Visit macmillan.org.uk/translations

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The prostate

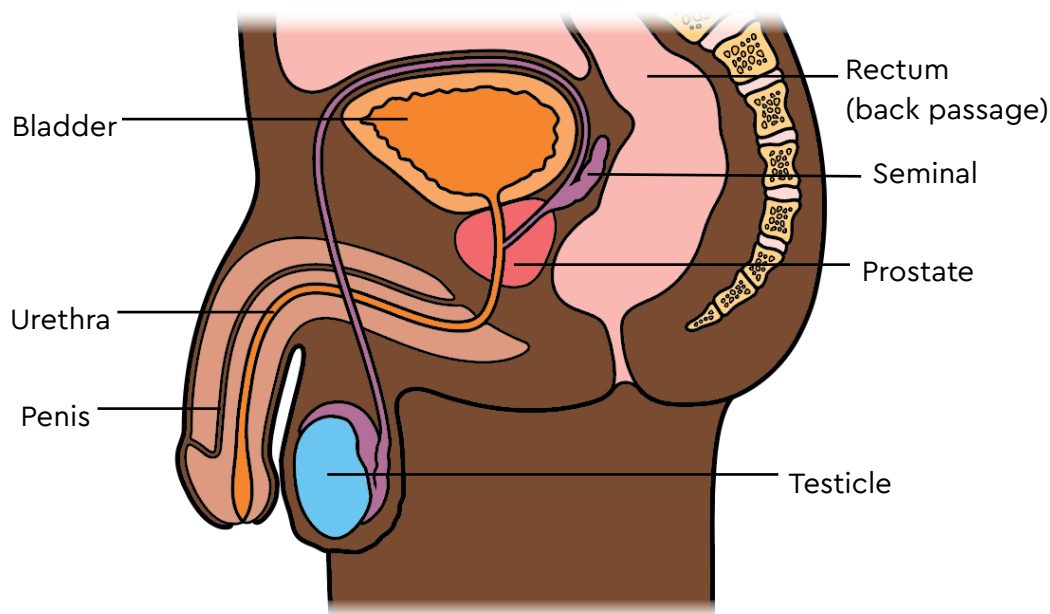
The prostate is a small gland about the size of a walnut. It gets bigger with age. The prostate surrounds the first part of the tube (urethra) that carries urine from the bladder to the penis.

People who have a prostate include men, transgender (trans) women and people assigned male at birth.

If you are a trans woman and have had genital gender affirming surgery as part of your transition, you will still have a prostate. If you do not identify as a man but were assigned male at birth, you still need to be aware of prostate cancer.

It is important to talk to your GP or nurse if you are worried about prostate cancer or have symptoms.

Illustration of male reproductive organs



What does the prostate do?

The prostate makes a fluid that mixes with sperm from the testicles to make semen. During sex, muscle tissue helps force prostate fluid and sperm into the urethra.

The sex hormone testosterone is made by the testicles. It controls how the prostate works. Testosterone is responsible for things like your sex drive, getting an erection, and muscle development.

The prostate also makes a protein called prostate-specific antigen (PSA). This helps to make semen more liquid.

PSA can be measured in a blood test. When it is used with other tests the PSA test can help doctors diagnose prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer

All parts of the body are made up of tiny cells. Prostate cancer happens when cells in the prostate grow in an uncontrolled way. They eventually form a lump called a tumour.

Some prostate cancers grow slowly but other prostate cancers grow faster.

Sometimes prostate cancer cells spread outside the prostate to other parts of the body.

Prostate cancer is not infectious and cannot be passed on to other people.

Who can get prostate cancer?

The risk of prostate cancer increases as you get older.

It is more common in men over 65. It is much less common in men under 50.

We do not know what causes it. But certain risk factors may increase the chances of getting it. Black men have a much higher risk of developing prostate cancer and are more likely to get it at a younger age.

Transgender women can develop prostate cancer, but there is not enough evidence to know how common this is.

Prostate cancer is more common in some families. Talk to your doctor (GP) if you are worried about your risk of prostate cancer.

Stages and grades of prostate cancer

The stage of a cancer means how big it is and if it has spread. The grade of a cancer is how quickly the cancer may grow.

Prostate cancer is divided into 5 risk groups. The risk group is worked out using the stage of the cancer, the grade of the cancer and the PSA level. Doctors use the risk group to decide the best treatment for you.

Prostate cancer is often divided into these stages:

- **Early (localised) prostate cancer** – the cancer cells are only inside the prostate.
- **Locally advanced prostate cancer** – the cancer has spread into the tissues around the prostate.
- **Advanced (metastatic) prostate cancer** – the cancer has spread to another part of the body, usually to the bones.

Talking to your healthcare team

You usually meet with your cancer doctor and specialist nurse to talk about your treatment options. They will talk to you about your treatment plan. You may want to ask a family member or friend to come with you.

You need to know as much as possible before you can make any decisions. Cancer treatments can be complex. If the doctor says something you do not understand, ask them to explain it again.

Your doctor or nurse will explain how any treatment side effects can be controlled and what you can do to manage them. They can also tell you if your treatment is likely to cause any late effects and how these can be managed. Late effects are side effects that do not go away, or develop months or years later.

You and your doctor can decide together on the best treatment plan for you. You may need more than one meeting with your doctor or nurse to talk about your treatment plan.

After talking with you, your doctor will ask you to sign a form to show that you understand and agree to the treatment. This is called a consent form. You will not have any treatment unless you have agreed to it.

Your hospital can arrange an interpreter for you. If you need an interpreter, it is important to tell your nurse before your appointment.

Questions to ask about your treatment

- What does my diagnosis mean?
- What is the stage and grade of the cancer?
- What treatments are available?
- What are the benefits, risks and side effects of each treatment?
- How will the treatment affect my daily life?
- Who can I talk to about how I am feeling?

Treatment for prostate cancer

Your treatment will depend on factors, such as:

- the stage, grade and risk group of the cancer
- your age and general health
- the benefits of treatment and possible side effects
- what you think about the available treatments.

Early (localised) prostate cancer

Treatments for early prostate cancer include:

- active surveillance
- an operation (surgery) to remove the prostate (prostatectomy)
- radiotherapy
- watch and wait (watchful waiting)
- hormonal therapy.

Your cancer team will talk to you about possible treatments. Together you will decide on the best treatment for you.

Locally advanced prostate cancer

The most common treatments for locally advanced prostate cancer are:

- radiotherapy
- hormonal therapy
- watch and wait (watchful waiting).

Surgery to remove the prostate is not often done for locally advanced prostate cancer. If you are having difficulty passing urine, you may have an operation to help you pass urine more easily.

Your cancer team will talk to you about possible treatments and you can decide together the best treatment for you.

Advanced (metastatic) prostate cancer

The cancer has spread to another part of the body, usually to the bones.

Treatments for advanced prostate cancer include:

- hormonal therapy
- chemotherapy
- radiotherapy.

Advanced prostate cancer can cause symptoms such as pain or bowel and bladder problems. There are lots of ways to control symptoms. Your doctor can give you different drugs or medicines to help with symptoms. Always tell your doctor if symptoms do not improve.

Active surveillance

Active surveillance means you can avoid or delay treatment and its side effects. You will only have treatment if the cancer is growing. Active surveillance is only suitable if you have early prostate cancer that is low risk.

Your healthcare team will arrange regular tests. These include PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood tests and MRI scans. Your healthcare team can tell you how often you might need tests. You may have an MRI scan if the cancer changes. You usually only need a prostate biopsy if there are any signs the cancer may be growing.

If the cancer starts to grow more quickly or you get symptoms, your doctors will offer you treatment to try to cure the cancer.

Surgery

Surgery to remove the prostate is called a prostatectomy. This operation aims to get rid of all of the cancer cells. It is usually only done when the cancer has not spread outside the prostate gland.

There are different ways this can be done:

- **Laparoscopic prostatectomy (keyhole surgery)** – the surgeon makes 5 or 6 small cuts, about 1cm each, in your tummy area (abdomen). They remove the prostate using special instruments that are put through the small cuts.
- **Robotic-assisted laparoscopic prostatectomy** – the surgeon controls a machine with robotic arms. It can move very precisely.
- **Open prostatectomy** – the surgeon makes one larger cut in the tummy area (abdomen). The whole prostate is removed through the cut. Sometimes they remove the prostate through a cut in the area between the scrotum and the anus.

Your doctor will discuss the operation they think is best for you and its possible side effects.

The main possible side effects of surgery are:

- problems with urine leaking (urinary incontinence)
- problems getting or keeping erections (erectile dysfunction)
- infertility – after the operation you will no longer be able to have children. If you want children, it may be possible to store sperm before your operation. Speak to your cancer team about this.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy uses high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells. There are different ways of having radiotherapy. It is often given from outside the body by a machine. This is called external beam radiotherapy. There are different ways of giving external beam radiotherapy. You usually have external beam radiotherapy as an outpatient. This means you come to hospital for treatment and then go home again that day.

Sometimes radiotherapy can be given by placing a radioactive material inside the body. This is called internal radiotherapy or brachytherapy. It is only used for early or locally advanced prostate cancer.

There are two ways of having it:

- Small radioactive seeds are placed in the prostate and stay there permanently.
- Thin tubes are placed in the prostate. These are attached to a machine that sends radioactive material into the tubes for a set time.

Radiotherapy can cause some side effects. These include:

- The skin in the treated area may become red, if you have white skin, or darker, if you have dark skin.
- You may need to pass urine more often or urgently.
- You may have watery or loose poo (diarrhoea), wind and tummy pain.
- You may develop problems getting an erection 2 to 5 years after radiotherapy.

Tell your cancer team about any side effects you may have.

Radiotherapy may be used to treat symptoms of advanced prostate cancer, such as pain in the bones.

We have more information about radiotherapy in your language on our website. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

Hormonal therapy

The hormone testosterone makes prostate cancer grow. Hormonal therapies either reduce testosterone levels in the body or block testosterone. They can be given as tablets or injections.

You may have hormonal therapy before, during and after radiotherapy. It makes radiotherapy work better. You may have it for up to 3 years after radiotherapy to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back.

If you are not well enough, or do not want to have, surgery or radiotherapy, you may have hormonal therapy on its own.

You may also have hormonal therapy if you are having watchful waiting and the cancer starts to grow.

Hormonal therapy is the main treatment for advanced prostate cancer. It can:

- shrink the cancer
- slow its growth
- reduce the symptoms of cancer.

There are some side effects of hormonal therapy. These include:

- hot flushes and sweats
- difficulty getting and keeping an erection
- tiredness
- mood changes
- weight gain.

Watch and wait (watchful waiting)

Along with your cancer team, you may decide to wait before starting any treatment. This is called watchful waiting. Your doctor may talk to you about watchful waiting if:

- you are not well enough to have radiotherapy or surgery
- you have another medical condition that makes treatment difficult.

If there is no sign the cancer is growing more quickly, it is safe to continue with watchful waiting. If you develop symptoms your doctor will usually talk to you about having hormonal therapy. You need to see your doctor, usually your GP, regularly for check-ups.

Other treatments for early prostate cancer

Some early prostate cancers may be treated with cryotherapy or HIFU treatment. These treatments can be used when there is only one small area of cancer in the prostate. Sometimes they may treat the whole prostate.

Cryotherapy uses a cold gas to freeze and destroy cancer cells. The gas is passed through thin needles that are passed through the area behind your scrotum.

HIFU uses heat to destroy cancer cells. The doctor passes a probe into your back passage (rectum). The probe produces a high energy beam of ultrasound which delivers heat to affected area.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer drugs to destroy cancer cells. It is only used to treat prostate cancer that has spread to other parts of the body. It can be given with hormonal therapy. A nurse will give you the chemotherapy drugs into a vein (intravenously).

Chemotherapy drugs can cause side effects. These depend on which chemotherapy drug you are given. These include:

- being more likely to get an infection
- feeling tired
- feeling sick or being sick
- a sore mouth
- hair loss.

Your cancer team will talk to you about the side effects you may have and how to manage them. Most side effects can be controlled with drugs. Most side effects go away when chemotherapy is over.

We have more information about chemotherapy in your language on our website. Visit macmillan.org.uk/translations

Coping with treatment side effects

Treatments for prostate cancer can cause some difficult and upsetting side effects. Your doctor will explain the side effects you are likely to have.

Not everyone gets all these side effects. It depends on the treatment you have.

Possible side effects could be:

- **Sexual problems** – you may not want to have sex or find it hard to get or keep an erection. This is called erectile dysfunction (ED). Your doctor or nurse can give you advice. There are drugs and other treatments that can help with this.
- **Bladder problems** – you may need to pass urine more often or have some urine leaking (incontinence). Your doctor or nurse can talk to you about what can help.
- **Hot flushes and sweats** – these may reduce as your body gets used to hormonal treatment.
- **Breast swelling or tenderness** – some hormonal therapy drugs may cause this. You may be given radiotherapy to the chest before treatment to prevent this. Or your doctors may give you a hormonal drug called tamoxifen to reduce breast swelling.
- **Weight gain (especially around the middle) and loss of muscle strength** – regular physical activity and a healthy, balanced diet can help to manage this.
- **Bone thinning (osteoporosis)** – this is more likely with long-term hormonal treatment. Regular weight-bearing exercises such as walking, dancing, hiking or gentle weight-lifting can help keep your bones healthy.

There are different ways these can be managed. Always talk to your doctor or nurse about side effects.

Other side effects include tiredness and mood changes. We have more information about side effects in your language on our website.

Visit macmillan.org.uk/translations

Macmillan toilet card

You may worry about going out if you need to use a toilet urgently. It may help to carry a free Macmillan toilet card. You can show this in places such as shops, offices and cafes. We hope it will help you get access to a toilet but it may not work everywhere.

The card is only available in English and reads 'due to my cancer treatment I need urgent access to a toilet. Please can you help?'

You can get one by calling our Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**. Or you can order one at orders.macmillan.org.uk

You can also use disabled toilets. They have a wash basin and space to change your clothes. Disabled toilets are sometimes locked. You can buy a key from [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/).

Follow up

After your treatment has finished, you will have regular check-ups and tests. These may continue for several years but will happen less often over time.

If you notice any new symptoms between check-ups, tell your GP or cancer team as soon as possible.

Your feelings

You may feel overwhelmed when you are told you have cancer and have many different emotions. There is no right or wrong way to feel. There are many ways to cope with your emotions. Talking to a close friend or relative may help. Your doctor or nurse can help too.

Getting the right care and support for you

If you have cancer and do not speak English, you may be worried that this will affect your cancer treatment and care. But your healthcare team should offer you care, support and information that meets your needs.

We know that sometimes people may have extra challenges in getting the right support. For example, if you work or have a family you might also have worries about money and transport costs. All of this can be stressful and hard to cope with.

How Macmillan can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we are here to support you.

Macmillan Support Line

We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

Our expert advisers on the Macmillan Support Line can help with medical questions or be there to listen if you need someone to talk to. We can also talk to you about your money worries and recommend other useful organisations that can help. The free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Macmillan website

Our website has lots of information in English about cancer. There is also more information in other languages at macmillan.org.uk/translations

We may also be able to arrange translations just for you. Email informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk to tell us what you need.

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. Visit one to get the information you need and speak with someone face to face. Find your nearest centre at macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Local support groups

At a support group, you can talk to other people affected by cancer. Find out about support groups in your area at macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Macmillan Online Community

You can also talk to other people affected by cancer online at macmillan.org.uk/community

You can access it at any time of day or night. You can share your experiences, ask questions, or just read people's posts.

More information in your language

We have information in your language about these topics:

Signs and symptoms of cancer

- Signs and symptoms cards

If you are diagnosed with cancer

- Cancer care in the UK
- Healthcare for refugees and people seeking asylum
- If you are diagnosed with cancer

Types of cancer

- Bowel cancer
- Breast cancer
- Cervical cancer
- Lung cancer
- Prostate cancer

Treatment for cancer

- Chemotherapy
- Radiotherapy
- Sepsis and cancer
- Side effects of cancer treatment
- Surgery

Living with cancer

- Claiming benefits when you have cancer
- Eating problems and cancer
- Healthy eating
- Help with costs when you have cancer
- LGBTQ+ people and cancer
- Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer

End of life

- End of life

To see this information, go to macmillan.org.uk/translations

For more support to understand information, go to macmillan.org.uk/understandinginformation

References and thanks

This information has been written and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been translated professionally.

The information included is based on our prostate cancer content available in English on our website.

This information has been reviewed by relevant experts and approved by members of Macmillan's Centre of Clinical Expertise or other senior clinicians or experts.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this information.

All our information is based on the best evidence available. For more information about the sources we use, please contact us at

informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk

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