

Prostate Cancer

The word “cancer” terrifies patients and families, and with good reason. Cancer causes pain, disability and in some cases, death. The great news is that prostate cancer, when detected early, is highly treatable.

What is the prostate gland?

The prostate gland is located in the pelvic area in men. It sits just below the bladder. Its function is to secrete fluid or semen, during ejaculation. In young men, it is the size of a walnut, but over time it can grow to be quite large. Later in life, some of the prostate cells can become cancerous and if untreated, can spread to other parts of the body.

Screening for Prostate Cancer

There are two parts to the prostate cancer screening process. First, a digital rectal exam, or DRE, is used to check for abnormality of the prostate gland. Nobody likes a prostate exam! However, it takes only 5 seconds to perform and is an essential part of prostate care. Because of its location just in front of the rectum, the prostate can be examined using a finger in the rectum. Your provider will be checking for any masses, lumps or asymmetry of the prostate.

Second, a blood test is used to screen for cancer of the prostate. The prostate gland normally secretes a hormone called *prostate specific antigen* (PSA), which can be measured with a simple blood test. The normal range for men is 0 to 4.0, but many factors influence the blood test result. PSA rises with prostate enlargement, infection, lab variation and prostate cancer. Both the absolute value and the change over time are relevant in checking for prostate cancer. If cancer is suspected, a biopsy may be necessary.

Prostate Biopsy

Prostate biopsy is an office procedure performed by a physician in our office to check prostate cells for abnormality. Ultrasound is used to guide the biopsy process. Samples are examined by a pathologist and results are usually available within one week. If the biopsy is negative, the PSA and rectal exam will continue to be checked for changes. If it is positive, your provider will discuss with you various treatment options.

Prostate Cancer Treatment

Commonly chosen options for prostate cancer treatment include chemotherapy given by one injection every three months, radiation therapy, implanted radiation seeds, and surgery. At your cancer consultation, one of our providers will help you decide which is the best option for you, your family and your lifestyle.

Links:

The American Urologic Association:

<http://www.urologyhealth.org/adult/index.cfm?cat=09>

National Institutes of Health: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/prostatediseases.html>

National Cancer Institute: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/understanding-prostate-changes>