



Canadian Cancer Society  
Société canadienne du cancer

## Talking about Prostate Cancer



Let's Make Cancer History

1 888 939-3333 | [cancer.ca](https://cancer.ca)

## Talking about Prostate Cancer

“ *If I can avoid going to a doctor, I will – but not when we’re talking about prostate cancer. Why take chances with a condition that might be serious?*  
~ Anthony

This brochure provides basic information about prostate cancer – the kind of information all men need to make important decisions about their prostate health.

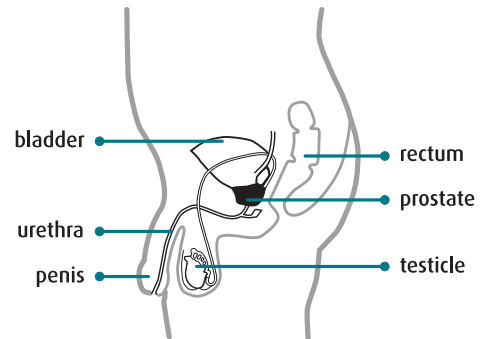
It might seem easier to just avoid the subject. And you’ve probably got things you would much rather do with your time. But the facts are clear. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in Canadian men. You have a 1 in 7 chance of developing the disease in your lifetime.

That’s why it’s so important to talk to your doctor about prostate cancer, especially if you’re in your 40s or older. This brochure will help you get the conversation started.

## The prostate and cancer

The prostate is part of the male reproductive system. It produces fluid that forms part of the semen. It also helps control the flow of urine.

The prostate gland is shaped like a chestnut. It’s located just below the bladder, in front of the rectum. It surrounds the urethra, a tube that carries urine and semen through the penis.



Prostate size varies from man to man. As you get older, the prostate often gets bigger and can restrict urine flow.

Prostate cancer develops when cancer cells multiply in the prostate and form a tumour. The tumour can grow quickly and need immediate treatment. Or it can grow slowly without causing serious health problems.

## Prostate cancer testing

There are two tests available to help detect prostate cancer early. They are often used in combination.

A **digital rectal examination (DRE)** is a physical examination of the prostate. The doctor gently places a lubricated, gloved finger into the rectum to feel the prostate gland. Most prostate cancers develop in the part of the prostate that's closest to the rectum. This makes it easy for the doctor to feel lumps or anything else that seems unusual.

A **prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test** is a blood test. It measures a substance called prostate-specific antigen, which is made by the prostate. Higher levels of this antigen can indicate a problem with the prostate. The problem may or may not be cancer.

PSA levels vary with age and tend to rise gradually in men over 60. There is no specific level that confirms you have prostate cancer. If a PSA test shows levels higher than normal for your age, your doctor will do more tests.

### Reasons for having a higher than normal PSA level

PSA levels may be higher than normal for your age for many reasons, such as:

- an enlarged prostate (*benign prostatic hyperplasia*, a common non-cancerous condition that causes many of the same symptoms as prostate cancer)
- an inflamed or infected prostate (*prostatitis*)
- a recent medical test on the prostate (such as biopsy or ultrasound)
- recent sexual activity
- cancer cells in the prostate

## Talking to your doctor

“ My dad is one of those always healthy, active, athletic men who never goes to the doctor. One year he finally went in for a checkup and they decided to do the tests to detect prostate cancer and turns out my dad had it. It was aggressive, but they caught it. Now, 10 years later, he's back to full health. He's 75 and still plays hockey regularly! I will forever be grateful that he saw his doctor that day. ~ Gord

Many men are uncomfortable talking about their prostate – even to a doctor. It might help to remember that this is part of your doctor's job description. To a doctor, the prostate is no different than a knee or an elbow.

Once the conversation is underway, it usually gets easier. The key is to start talking. Your doctor is there to help you and can answer your questions on topics that range from testing to symptoms to risk factors. Together, you can discuss your options.

### Talking about testing

As you approach the age of 50, make time to talk to your doctor about prostate cancer testing. This is true even if you feel well and don't have any symptoms to report.

Know that test results can be confusing. Sometimes they cause “false alarms”, suggesting prostate cancer when there isn't any. Sometimes they fail to detect prostate cancer. And in some cases, the tests detect cancer that is

growing so slowly it poses no serious threat to your health.

For these reasons, experts are divided about whether prostate cancer testing is useful for men with no symptoms. Some doctors recommend it – others don't.

The choice is yours to make. Talk to your doctor about the benefits and risks of testing. Then you can make an informed decision that's right for you.

“ *The worst thing you can hear is, 'You've got cancer.' But that's what my doctor told me when I was 58. I'm 70 now, and hormone and other treatments have kept it in check. If I hadn't been tested, the prostate cancer could have spread and I might have needed more radical treatment* ~ Dick

### Questions to ask your doctor

- What's my risk of developing prostate cancer?
- What tests should I have, if any?
- What are the pros and cons of having the tests?
- Is there a cost for the tests and if so, how much?
- What happens if my test results aren't normal?
- How often should I be tested?

### Questions to ask yourself

- What would I do if the tests came back abnormal?
- What would I do if further testing showed I have early prostate cancer?
- Would I be comfortable knowing that I have prostate cancer but that no active treatment (surgery, drugs or radiation) is needed right away?

## Talking about symptoms

If you have any of the following symptoms, it's important to talk to your doctor as soon as possible. Report any of the following:

- a need to urinate often, especially at night
- an intense or urgent need to urinate
- painful urination
- difficulty starting or stopping urine flow
- inability to urinate
- weak, decreased or interrupted urine stream
- a feeling that the bladder hasn't completely emptied
- blood in the urine or semen
- painful ejaculation

### Don't ignore symptoms

The sooner you report symptoms to your doctor, the sooner testing to help diagnose and treat the problem can begin. Symptoms may be caused by prostate cancer or by another health problem.

## Talking about risk factors

It's also important to talk to your doctor about risk factors for prostate cancer. There is no single cause of prostate cancer. But risk factors increase your chances of developing the disease.

Depending on your risk, your doctor may recommend that you think about testing at an earlier age – as young as 40.

### Age

Your risk of prostate cancer rises as you grow older.

## Family history

Your risk is higher if a first-degree relative has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. This includes a father, brother or son. The risk increases if more than one relative has been diagnosed and if they were diagnosed at a younger age.

## African ancestry

Several research studies have confirmed that men of African ancestry have about a 60% higher rate of prostate cancer than Caucasian men. The reasons for this are not clear.

## The Canadian Cancer Society can help

We include here only those risk factors that have been proven by research to increase your chances of developing prostate cancer. You cannot change any of these risk factors. But being aware of them can help you make decisions about prostate cancer testing.

Several research studies are underway to answer important questions about these and other possible risk factors for prostate cancer and about prostate cancer testing. Contact us for the most up-to-date information.

## Find out more

To learn more about prostate cancer, contact us:

- Call an information specialist toll-free at **1 888 939 3333** (TTY: 1 866 786-3934) Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. If you need help in another language, interpreters are available.
- E-mail us at [info@cis.cancer.ca](mailto:info@cis.cancer.ca).
- Visit our website at [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca).





## What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer, our services or to make a donation.



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PREVENTING CANCER



Get involved **Live well** Be aware Get involved  
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