

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Proposed publication date: Aug. 21, 2023

Content provided by: Alberta Health Services

What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is the abnormal growth of cells in a man's prostate gland. The prostate sits just below the bladder. In young men, the prostate is about the size of a walnut. As men age, the prostate usually grows larger.

Prostate cancer is common in men older than 65. It usually grows slowly and can take years to grow large enough to cause any problems. As with other cancers, treatment for prostate cancer works best when the cancer is found early.

Experts don't know what causes prostate cancer, but they believe that your age, family history (genetics), and race affect your chances of getting it.

What are the symptoms?

Prostate cancer usually doesn't cause symptoms in its early stages. Most men don't know they have it until it is found during a regular medical examination.

When problems are noticed, they are most often problems with urinating. But these same symptoms can also be caused by an enlarged prostate (benign prostatic hyperplasia). An enlarged prostate is common in older men.

How is prostate cancer diagnosed?

The most common way to check for prostate cancer is to have a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test. PSA tests can help find some prostate cancers early, when the cancer may be easier to treat. A large study of prostate cancer screening showed that PSA testing may prevent a small number of deaths from prostate cancer.

A higher level of PSA may mean that you have prostate cancer. But it could also mean that you have an enlargement or infection of the prostate.

If your PSA is high, you may need a prostate biopsy to figure out the cause. A biopsy means that your doctor takes tissue samples from your prostate gland and sends them to a lab for testing.

How is prostate cancer treated?

Your treatment will depend on what kind of cancer cells you have, how far they have spread, your age and general health, and your preferences.

You and your doctor may decide to manage your cancer with active surveillance or to treat it with surgery or radiation.

If you are over age 80 or have other serious health problems, like heart disease, you may choose not to have treatments to cure your cancer. Instead, you can just have treatments to manage your symptoms. This is called watchful waiting.

Choosing treatment for prostate cancer can be confusing. Talk with your doctor to choose the treatment that's best for you. You may also wish to call Health Link at 811 to speak with a Registered nurse.