

# Know your prostate

A guide to common prostate problems



# Introduction

This guide is for anyone who wants to know more about the prostate gland. It tells you what the prostate gland is and what it does. It also describes the three most common prostate problems that affect men – an enlarged prostate, prostatitis and prostate cancer.

At the end of this guide you will find details of other publications and sources of help. If you think you may have a problem with your prostate, you can talk to your doctor (GP) or call our confidential Helpline.

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The following symbols appear throughout the booklet to guide you to sources of further information:



The Prostate Cancer Charity Helpline



The Prostate Cancer Charity publications



If you would like to know more about anything you read in this booklet, you can call our specialist nurses on 0800 074 8383.

# Contents

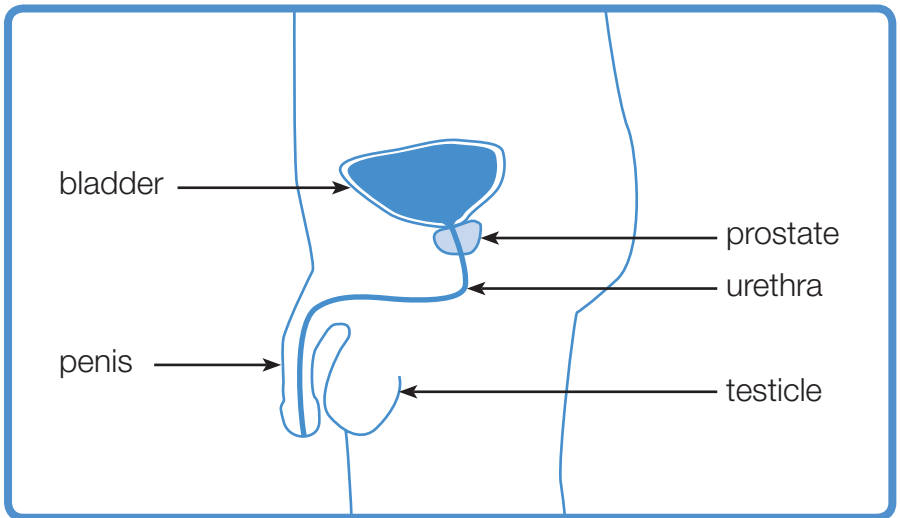


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# What is the prostate gland?

Only men have a prostate gland. The prostate is usually the size and shape of a walnut. It lies underneath the bladder and surrounds the tube that men pass urine and semen through (the urethra).

The prostate gland's main job is to make some of the fluid that carries sperm, called semen.



# What can go wrong?

The three most common prostate problems are:

- An enlarged prostate – this is the most common prostate problem
- An inflammation or infection in the prostate, called prostatitis
- Prostate cancer

You can find out more about these conditions further on in this booklet.



# What changes should I look out for?

If you have a problem in your prostate your urinary habits may change. This is because your prostate surrounds the tube you pass urine through (urethra).

For some men problems with passing urine may be a sign that they have a prostate problem, usually an enlarged prostate (benign prostatic hyperplasia or enlargement). Most men with early prostate cancer do not have any urinary symptoms. Read more about prostate cancer on page 12.

Problems with passing urine are not always to do with the prostate. They could be caused by another health problem, such as diabetes, or by any medicines you are taking, such as anti-depressants.

## Passing urine: what is normal?

Your bladder should be able to hold up to three-quarters of a pint (about 430ml). Most people pass urine about four to seven times each day depending on how much they drink.

Your bladder should tell you when it is full but give you enough time to find a toilet. Your bladder should empty completely every time you pass urine and you should not leak any urine.

Most people can sleep six to eight hours without having to urinate. As we get older the amount of urine we produce overnight increases. Middle aged and older men often wake to urinate once in the early morning hours.

Your lifestyle may also cause urinary symptoms, for example if you often drink large amounts of fluid or drink a lot of alcohol or caffeine.

If you are having problems with passing urine, it is still a good idea to get things checked out, even if it is just to put your mind at rest.

Symptoms to look out for include:

- Needing to urinate more often, especially at night – for example if you often need to go again after two hours
- Difficulty starting to pass urine
- Straining or taking a long time to finish urinating
- A weak flow of urine
- A feeling that your bladder has not emptied properly
- Needing to rush to the toilet – you may occasionally leak urine before you get there
- Dribbling urine

Less common symptoms of a prostate problem include:

- Pain when passing urine
- Pain when ejaculating
- Problems getting or keeping an erection – this is not a common symptom of a prostate problem and is more often caused by other health conditions
- Blood in the urine or semen

You may find it helpful to tick any symptoms that you have and take this booklet with you if you are going to see your GP.



Problems with passing urine are common in older men but this does not mean men should have to put up with them. There are treatments for urinary symptoms and prostate problems and there may be ways for some men to manage them for themselves.

If you have any of the symptoms above you should think about visiting your GP. Read more about visiting the GP on page 17. You



can also talk to a specialist nurse by calling our confidential Helpline.

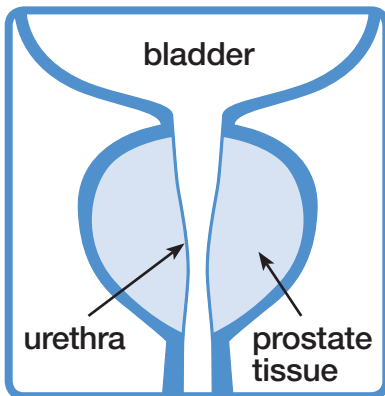


# What is an enlarged prostate?

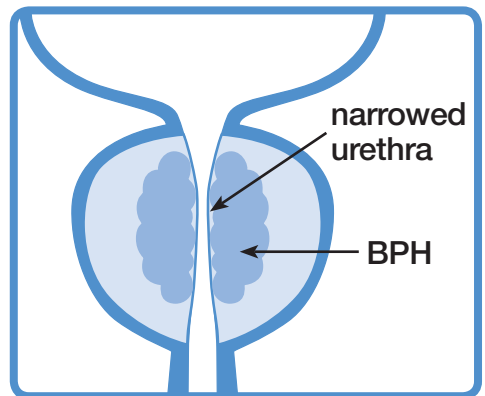
Having an enlarged prostate, also known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) or enlargement (BPE), is a common condition that affects many men from the age of about 50 years. About four out of every ten men (40 per cent) over the age of 50 and three out of four men (75 per cent) in their 70s have urinary symptoms that may be caused by an enlarged prostate.

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) is an increase in the number of cells in the prostate gland. It is not a form of cancer. BPH causes your prostate gland to grow in size as you get older. In some cases if your prostate gets bigger it can cause the urethra to narrow and slow down the flow of urine.

**A normal prostate gland**



**An enlarged prostate gland**



An enlarged prostate is the most common cause of urinary symptoms in men as they get older. Without treatment, some men may find that the symptoms slowly get worse.

Having an enlarged prostate does not put you at greater risk of getting prostate cancer. BPH and prostate cancer tend to begin in different areas of the prostate gland. It is possible to have both an enlarged prostate and prostate cancer at the same time.

An enlarged prostate usually develops slowly and your symptoms may not get any worse. If your symptoms are not affecting your quality of life and there are no complications, your GP or specialist may advise you to wait and see how your condition develops.

Mild urinary symptoms may be relieved by making some simple changes to your lifestyle, such as avoiding alcohol and caffeine and drinking less in the evening. If these lifestyle changes do not relieve your symptoms then your doctor may also prescribe medicines or recommend surgery. You can find out more by



reading our booklet **Enlarged prostate: A guide for men concerned about benign prostatic hyperplasia.**

# What is prostatitis?

Prostatitis can be caused by an infection or inflammation of the prostate gland. It is not a form of cancer. Prostatitis can cause a wide variety of symptoms, which differ from man to man and include those described on page 7.

In severe cases it may cause fever and sweating and you may need treatment in hospital. Prostatitis can affect men of any age but is more common in men aged between 30 and 50.

There are different types of prostatitis which are treated in different ways. Some men may take antibiotics or other medicines called alpha-blockers.

**i** Read our booklet **Prostatitis: A guide to infection and inflammation of the prostate** for more information.



# What is prostate cancer?

Normally the growth of all cells is carefully controlled in the body. As cells die, they are replaced in an orderly fashion. Cancer can develop when cells start to grow in an uncontrolled way. If this happens in the prostate gland, prostate cancer can develop.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men in the UK. Prostate cancer often grows slowly and mainly affects older men.

## What are the risk factors for prostate cancer?

In the UK, about one in nine men (eleven per cent) will get prostate cancer at some point in their lives. There are things that may increase your chance of getting prostate cancer:

### Age

Prostate cancer mainly affects men over the age of 50 and your risk increases with age. The average age for men to be diagnosed with prostate cancer is between 70 and 74 years. If you are under 50 then your risk of getting prostate cancer is very low. Younger men can be affected, but this is rare.

### Family history

You are two and a half times more likely to get prostate cancer if your father or brother has been diagnosed with it, compared to a man who has no relatives with prostate cancer. There might be a higher chance of a man developing prostate cancer if his relative was under 60 when he was diagnosed or he had more than one close relative with prostate cancer.

Inside every cell in our body is a set of instructions called genes. These are inherited from our parents. Genes control how the body grows, works and what it looks like. Researchers have found some characteristics in genes that might be passed on through your parents and could increase your risk of developing prostate cancer. Only five to ten per cent of prostate cancers are thought to be strongly linked to genes. Researchers have found that changes in two genes called BRCA1 and BRCA2 can increase a woman's chance of developing breast and ovarian cancer, and can also increase a man's chance of developing prostate cancer. Changes in these genes are rare but if you have relatives with breast and/or ovarian cancer and are worried about this, you could speak to your GP. Having these genes does not necessarily mean you will get prostate cancer.

### **Ethnicity**

In the UK, men of black Caribbean or black African descent are three times more likely to develop prostate cancer than white men of the same age. They may also develop prostate cancer at an earlier age than white men. The reasons for this increased risk are not yet clear but may be due to changes in their genes passed down through generations.

Prostate cancer seems to be less common in South Asian and Chinese men but we need more research to help us understand the reasons for this. If you are a man of South Asian or Chinese origin you can still get prostate cancer. If you are worried speak



to your GP or ring our confidential Helpline.

## Lifestyle

No one knows how to prevent prostate cancer yet but diet and a healthy lifestyle may be important in protecting against the disease.

## What are the symptoms of prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer can grow slowly or very quickly. Most prostate cancer is slow-growing to start with and may never cause any symptoms or problems in a man's lifetime. However, some men will have cancer that is more aggressive or 'high risk.' This needs treatment to help prevent or delay it spreading outside the prostate gland.

If a man does have symptoms, such as problems passing urine, they may be mild and happen over many years. For some men the first noticeable symptoms are from prostate cancer which has spread to their bones. If this happens, you may notice pain in your back, hips or pelvis that was not there before. These symptoms could be caused by other problems such as general aches and pains or arthritis, but it is still a good idea to get them checked out by your GP if you are worried.

## What treatments are there for prostate cancer?

There are several treatments available for prostate cancer. Some treatments aim to get rid of the cancer completely. Others aim to control the cancer. The stage of cancer and each man's preferences will affect which treatment they decide to have. If a man has slow growing cancer that is not likely to cause any problems in their lifetime, they may be able to delay treatment or avoid treatment altogether.



If you would like more information about prostate cancer and its treatment, we have a range of free publications available. Please see page 24 of this booklet for details.

# What should I do next?

If you have some of the symptoms on page 7 or if you are more at risk of prostate cancer you may want to get further advice or a check-up.

You could:



- Call our confidential Helpline and speak to a specialist nurse
- Go and see your GP

## What if I am not registered with a GP?

If you are not registered with a GP you could use the NHS Choices website or ring NHS Direct to find one in your area (contact details at the end of this booklet). You could also ask family or friends who live near you which GP surgery they go to.

## What if I do not have time to see a GP?

Some GP surgeries are now open in the evenings or weekends so you should be able to see the GP at a time that is right for you. You may also be able to go to an NHS walk-in centre, where you will not need an appointment. Use the NHS Choices website or ring NHS Direct to find one in your area.



# What will happen at the GP surgery?

Some men might be unsure about how they will explain their concerns or symptoms to their GP. You could always take this booklet in with you to show your GP or practice nurse.

If you are having symptoms your GP or practice nurse will ask you about them, how long you have had them and whether they are getting worse over time.

They may ask you to fill out a questionnaire about your symptoms to see how much bother they are causing in your daily life. There are a few tests that your GP may carry out to find out if you have a prostate problem.



Your GP may do some of these tests or you may need to visit a doctor who specialises in urinary problems (a urologist) or specialist nurse at the hospital. Ask your GP for more details about which tests you will have and what they involve. You can



also call our confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383.

You may not have all of the following tests.

### Urine test

You may be asked for a urine sample to check for any infection that could be causing you problems passing urine. This may also help rule out any problems with your kidneys or diabetes. Your GP might need to send the sample to the laboratory or they may be able to check it on the spot.

### Blood tests

You may be offered a blood test to check that your kidneys are working properly. Your GP may talk to you about having a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test.

PSA is a protein produced by cells in the prostate gland. The PSA level rises as you get older. Prostate problems such as an enlarged prostate and prostatitis, as well as prostate cancer, can cause your PSA level to rise. Before you decide whether to have the PSA test you may like to read about the pros and cons of the



test. For more information read our booklet **Understanding the PSA test: A guide for men concerned about prostate cancer.**

## Digital rectal examination (DRE)

Your GP may feel the back surface of your prostate gland for any hard or irregular areas and to estimate its size. This is called a digital rectal examination (DRE).

If you have a DRE your GP will ask you to lie on your side, on an examination table, with your knees brought up towards your chest. Your GP will slide their finger into your back passage. He or she will wear gloves and put some gel onto their finger to make it more comfortable. Your GP will feel your prostate for any hard or irregular areas and to judge its size. This may be uncomfortable, but it should not be painful. Some men understandably find it embarrassing but the check will be over quickly.

If the prostate gland feels larger than expected for your age this could be a sign of an enlarged prostate (benign prostatic hyperplasia). A prostate gland with hard bumpy areas may suggest prostate cancer.

You may be more likely to have the following tests at the hospital:

### Urine flow test

This test involves passing urine into a machine that measures the speed of your urine flow. You will need a full bladder for the test, but your doctor and nurse will tell you how much you will need to drink beforehand. If your prostate has grown bigger, it may cause your urethra to narrow and so slow down the flow of urine.

## Ultrasound scan

An ultrasound scan can show whether your bladder is emptying properly. You may have the scan after the urine flow test, described above, when you have finished passing urine. The scan will show any urine that is left in the bladder.

### Are you worried about going to the GP?

Some men worry about going to the GP because they do not want to have intimate examinations or think that the tests could be painful. It is natural to feel embarrassed, but any examinations should be over quickly and your GP or nurse is used to seeing the human body. You might prefer to see a male GP so you could ask for one when you make the appointment.

None of the tests should be painful, although some men find the DRE uncomfortable. Remember that your GP or nurse are not doing the tests unnecessarily. The test results will make sure that your GP or nurse can get the best idea about whether you have a problem that needs treating.

## What will the test results tell me?



It may take one or two weeks to get the results of any tests you have had but it can be quicker. If your test results suggest that you have a prostate problem, your doctor will discuss your treatment options with you or they may refer you to a specialist at the hospital (usually a doctor called a urologist).

For more detailed information about treatment options for an enlarged prostate, prostatitis or prostate cancer you can call our confidential Helpline to speak to a specialist nurse or visit our website at [www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk).

Your GP may also refer you to a specialist if they think that you might have a problem with your kidneys or bladder or if you have urinary problems that are very severe and are causing you a lot of bother.

## PSA test results

Before deciding on the next step, your GP will need to think about your PSA results as well as:

- Results from a digital rectal examination (DRE)
- Risk factors such as age, ethnicity and family history
- Other health problems or things that may have affected the results
- If you have had other tests like a prostate biopsy in the past. If you have had negative prostate biopsies in the past you may be less likely to have aggressive prostate cancer.

The GP should discuss your test results and these other issues with you. They may advise you that you do not need any further tests or that you should have another PSA test in the near future. If they think that you may have a prostate problem then they might make an appointment for you to see a specialist at a hospital. If you would like to see a specialist but your GP has not referred you to one, they should be happy to discuss this with you. You can read more about these issues in our booklet:



**Understanding the PSA test: A guide for men concerned about prostate cancer.**

# A to Z of medical words


- Biopsy** The removal of small samples of tissue to be looked at under a microscope. A biopsy of the prostate gland may be used to help diagnose prostate cancer.
- DRE** Digital rectal examination (DRE). A physical examination in which a doctor or nurse feels the prostate gland with a gloved, lubricated finger through the back passage (rectum). The DRE is used to help diagnose prostate problems and prostate cancer.
- GP** General practitioner (GP). A doctor who deals with a range of medical problems in people of all ages. Also known as a family doctor.
- PSA** Prostate specific antigen (PSA). A protein that is produced by the prostate gland. It is normal for all men to have a small amount of PSA in their blood. A raised PSA level can be due to a variety of reasons including age, infection, an enlarged prostate and prostate cancer.
- PSA test** A test that measures the amount of PSA in the blood. It can be used alongside other tests to help diagnose prostate problems and to monitor prostate cancer growth and the effectiveness of treatment.
- Urethra** In men, the tube that carries urine from the bladder, and semen from the reproductive system, through the penis and out of the body.

# The Prostate Cancer Charity

The Prostate Cancer Charity is the UK's leading charity working with people affected by prostate cancer. We fund research, provide support and information, and we campaign to improve the lives of men with prostate cancer. Our vision is a world where lives are no longer limited by prostate cancer.

## Confidential Helpline

If you have any questions about prostate cancer or other prostate problems call our confidential Helpline to speak to a specialist nurse.



**Confidential Helpline**  
**0800 074 8383\***  
Mon - Fri 10am - 4pm, Wed 7pm - 9pm

You can also send your questions to our specialist nurses by using our Helpline email contact form at [www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk).

## Publications

Other leaflets on prostate problems can be ordered free of charge from The Prostate Cancer Charity:

### **Understanding the PSA test: A guide for men concerned about prostate cancer**

A booklet for men who are thinking about having a PSA test or want to know more about it.

\* Calls may be monitored for training purposes. Confidentiality is maintained between callers and The Prostate Cancer Charity.



**Enlarged prostate: A guide for men concerned about benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)**

A booklet for men who want to know more about BPH, a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate gland.



**Prostatitis: A guide to infection or inflammation of the prostate**

A booklet for men who want to know more about the different types of prostatitis, including their causes, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment.

**Prostate cancer: A guide for newly diagnosed men**

This booklet is a personal guide for men who have recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

**What do you know about prostate cancer? Information for African Caribbean men**

Information for African Caribbean men on what causes prostate cancer and how it is diagnosed and treated.

To order these publications call our **Helpline on 0800 074 8383** or email us at **[literature@prostate-cancer.org.uk](mailto:literature@prostate-cancer.org.uk)**.

You can also download all of our publications from our website at **[www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk)**

# More information

The following organisations can give you information on prostate problems:

## **NHS Choices**

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Includes an A-Z of treatments and conditions and information on NHS health services in your local area.

## **NHS Direct**

0845 4647

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

For health advice or information on NHS services, such as GPs in your local area.

## **Patient UK**

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

This website contains information that GPs use with members of the public. Includes information on prostate problems.

References to sources of information used in the production of this booklet are available at [www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk)

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The Prostate Cancer Charity makes every effort to make sure that its services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about prostate cancer. We hope that these will add to the medical advice you have had and will help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your doctor if you are worried about any medical issues.

The Prostate Cancer Charity funds research into the causes of, and treatments for, prostate cancer. We also provide support and information to anyone concerned about prostate cancer. We rely on charitable donations to continue this work. If you would like to make a donation, call us on 020 8222 7666.

## The Prostate Cancer Charity

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Confidential Helpline

**0800 074 8383\***

Mon - Fri 10am - 4pm, Wed 7pm - 9pm

Website: [www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk)



\* Calls may be monitored for training purposes. Confidentiality is maintained between callers and the Prostate Cancer Charity.

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**PROSTATE**  
CANCER CHARITY