

A guide to having your PSA checked

What is a PSA test?

PSA is a chemical that is produced by both normal and abnormal prostate tissue. It can be measured by a blood test. The amount of PSA rises with age. Elevated levels of PSA may indicate cancer.

Who should have a PSA test?

There has been much debate about who should have a PSA test or whether all men should be "screened" using PSA to find prostate cancer. The consensus of opinion is that PSA is not suitable as a screening test and that individuals should decide themselves if they would like to have it checked.

Certain groups of men are high risk:

- Age > 70yr
- Afro- Caribbean's
- Patients with a positive family history

Why is it not suitable as a screening test?

- There are other reasons for a raised PSA
- 20% of men diagnosed with prostate cancer will have a normal PSA
- Two-thirds of men with a raised PSA will not have cancer cells in their prostate when they have a prostate biopsy
- A prostate biopsy is the only way to confirm prostate cancer and is recommended for all men with a raised PSA
- The test cannot tell if the cancer is slow or fast growing - many men may have cancer cells in their prostate which will never harm them

When should I avoid having the PSA test done?

- During an active kidney infection (UTI)
- Ejaculated in the past 48hr
- Exercised heavily in the last 48hr
- Had a prostate biopsy in the past six weeks
- Within 1 week of the doctor performing a digital rectal examination

What is an abnormal test?

A normal test depends on your age:

| Age | PSA levels |
|------------|-------------------|
| 50-59yr | Greater than 3.0 |
| 60-69yr | Greater than 4.0 |
| 70 yr + | Greater than 5.0 |

The results normally fall into one of three categories:

1. If your PSA is not raised you are unlikely to have cancer and no immediate further action is required
2. If your PSA is slightly raised you probably do not have cancer but further tests may be required
3. If you PSA is definitely raised you will be referred - see below

What will the doctor do if my PSA is raised?

If you have a raised PSA the doctor will refer you to a Urologist. The next stage is to have a prostate biopsy – the urology team will explain more about this when you attend for assessment.

Should I have the test?

You need to weigh up the pros and cons of having the test done:

| Benefits | Limitations |
|--|---|
| It can reassure you if the test is normal | It can miss cancer and provide false reassurance |
| It might find cancer at an early stage when treatments could be of benefit | It cannot tell if the cancer is fast or slow growing – many men with slow growing prostate cancer will never have clinically significant disease - this can lead to unnecessary worry |
| Having cancer treatment will usually extend life | 48 men will undergo treatment in order to save one life |
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Where can I get more information?

Visit the following site: www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/prostate/index.html

