

ASCO ANSWERS

PROSTATE CANCER

WHAT IS PROSTATE CANCER?

Prostate cancer is a disease in which normal cells in a man's prostate gland change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. Some prostate cancers grow very slowly and may not cause problems for years. Prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer diagnosed in men in the United States.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE PROSTATE?

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland located behind the base of the penis, in front of the rectum, and below the bladder. It surrounds the urethra, the tube-like channel that carries urine and semen through the penis. The prostate makes seminal fluid, the liquid in sperm that protects, supports, and helps transport sperm.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing the cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are four stages for prostate cancer: stages I through IV (one through four). More information is available at www.cancer.net/prostate.

HOW IS PROSTATE CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of prostate cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the man's overall health. For early-stage cancer, your doctor may recommend active surveillance (watchful waiting), starting treatment only when the cancer shows signs of spreading, causes pain, or blocks the urinary tract.

When the tumor has not spread outside the prostate, treatment options include surgery to remove the prostate and nearby lymph nodes or radiation therapy; these are similarly effective in this situation. Hormone therapy is often used to treat prostate cancer that continues to grow, even after surgery and/or radiation therapy, or to shrink large tumors before radiation therapy. Chemotherapy is commonly used for advanced prostate cancer that is resistant to hormone therapy. There are other treatment options that may also be used to control tumor growth and help relieve symptoms for men with advanced prostate cancer. When making treatment decisions, men may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options.

The side effects of prostate cancer treatment, including incontinence and sexual dysfunction, can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH PROSTATE CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

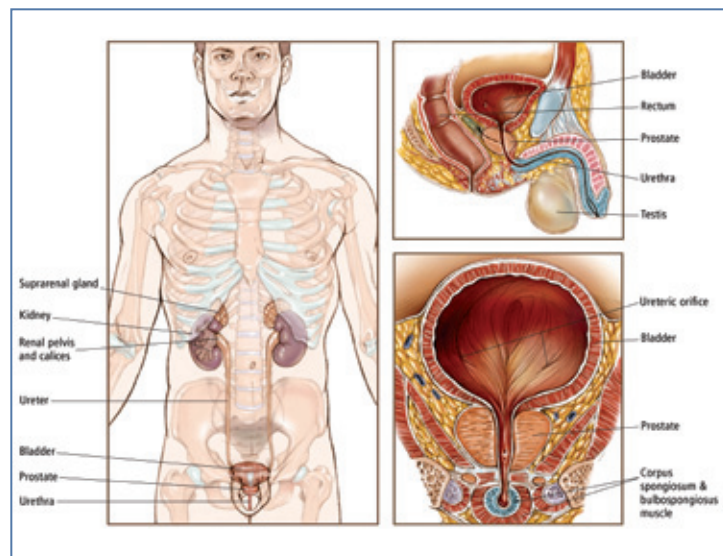


Illustration by Robert Morale/Visual Explanations, LLC. © 2004 American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What are the risks and benefits of screening for prostate cancer?
- What type of prostate cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the prostate cancer?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- Which treatment, or combination of treatments, do you recommend? Why?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- How will this treatment affect my sex life?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?



Learn more about
prostate cancer

- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/prostate.

Cancer.Net™

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

The ideas and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) or The Conquer Cancer Foundation. The information in this fact sheet is not intended as medical or legal advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a physician or other licensed health care provider. Patients with health care-related questions should call or see their physician or other health care provider promptly and should not disregard professional medical advice, or delay seeking it, because of information encountered here. The mention of any product, service, or treatment in this fact sheet should not be construed as an ASCO endorsement. ASCO is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of or related to any use of ASCO's patient education materials, or to any errors or omissions.

TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Gleason score:

An important factor for prognosis; describes how similar the cancer tissue is to healthy tissue

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Prostate-specific antigen (PSA):

A tumor marker (a type of protein released by prostate tissue) that may be found at higher-than-normal levels in men with prostate cancer or another prostate condition

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue