

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men in the UK. 37,000 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer every year. 250,000 men are currently living with the disease.

In the UK, about 1 in 9 men will get prostate cancer at some point in their lives. Older men, men with a family history of prostate cancer and men of black African and black Caribbean descent are more at risk.

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.

Prostate cancer can grow slowly or very quickly. Most prostate cancer is slow growing to start with and may never cause any problems or symptoms 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, a man may notice pain in his 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 a GP if you are concerned. Possible treatment options will depend on whether the cancer is contained within the prostate gland (**localised**), has spread just outside of the prostate (**locally advanced**) or had spread to other parts of the body (**advanced**).

Localised prostate cancer is cancer that has not spread outside of the prostate gland. This type of prostate cancer can behave in different ways. Most localised cancers are not aggressive and grow too slowly to cause any problems during your lifetime. However, some cancers may behave aggressively and spread to other parts of the body. Cancer specialists may use your test results to decide if your cancer is low risk, intermediate or high risk.

Locally advanced prostate cancer is cancer that has spread to the area just outside the prostate gland, but has not spread to other parts of the body. Different specialists sometimes use the term locally advanced prostate cancer in slightly different ways. If you have been diagnosed with locally advanced prostate cancer, ask the doctor or nurse what it means in your case, as this may affect what treatments are suitable for you.

Treatment options for locally advanced prostate cancer will depend on how far the cancer has spread outside of the prostate but usually treatment is aimed at controlling the cancer, rather than trying to get rid of it completely.

Advanced prostate cancer is cancer that has spread from the prostate gland to other parts of the body. It is also called 'metastatic' prostate cancer. It develops when tiny prostate cancer cells travel from the prostate to other parts of the body through the blood stream or lymphatic system.

Prostate cancer can spread to any part of the body but it most commonly spreads to the bones and the lymph nodes (sometimes called lymph glands).

If the cancer is contained within the prostate gland then there are treatments available that aim to get rid of the cancer completely, such as surgery to remove the prostate or radiotherapy.

If the cancer has spread outside of the prostate glands then treatment is usually aimed at controlling the cancer or managing symptoms.

Choice of treatment may depend on many factors including:

- The possible side effects of each treatment
- The advantages and disadvantages of the treatment, including practical aspects of treatment such as how often you would need to go to hospital
- Your general views about different treatments, for example some men prefer to have their prostate gland removed, while others may not like the idea of surgery
- How your cancer is behaving
- Your general health.

Information courtesy of The Prostate Cancer Charity.