



## A simple guide to the prostate

If you are reading this because you have worries or concerns about yourself or someone you know then the best thing to do is make an appointment with your GP or encourage that person to see their GP to talk over their symptoms.

### What is the prostate?

Only men have a prostate and it is usually about the size of a walnut. Around the age of 40 it starts to grow or enlarge and this may cause problems for a man when passing urine or not being able to pass urine.

### Where is it?

The prostate is inside the pelvis, just below the bladder and in front of the back passage. It wraps around the tube that allows urine to flow out of the bladder and for semen to pass out through the penis.

### What does the prostate do?

It supplies the fluid to nourish and protect sperm during intercourse. One of the proteins made in the prostate is Prostate Specific Antigen, or PSA. Because some PSA leaks out of the prostate, it's normal to find PSA in a man's blood. This can be measured and is called the PSA level.

## What are the most common symptoms or signs of prostate problems?

Is this like you or someone you know?

- Passing urine more often than before
- Getting up several times during the night, every night or almost every night, to pass urine
- Having to get to the toilet quickly with the risk of 'getting caught short'
- Standing over the toilet waiting for something to happen, then stopping and starting when passing urine
- Taking longer to empty the bladder with a weak dribbly flow of urine

If this sounds familiar then it is time to make an appointment to see your GP

There's also a symptom self-test on our website that you can fill in then print off to take to your GP

### So what could this mean?

As men get older, they may notice that they develop problems in passing urine. It doesn't mean that nothing can be done to help as there are treatments available. So, **don't** put off going to see your GP.

There are three conditions that may affect your prostate.

### Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH)

This is a very common condition. After the age of about 40, the prostate begins to get bigger or enlarge. From around the age of 50, this enlarging may start to cause problems. As the prostate gets bigger, it may squeeze the urethra, making this tube narrower and so slow down your flow of urine.

Sometimes as the prostate slowly gets bigger you may notice that your symptoms may gradually get worse disturbing your sleep and affecting your day-to-day life.

The good news is that the symptoms associated with BPH can be treated so it's important that you make an appointment with your GP. Once your GP has diagnosed BPH then they will talk about which treatment may be best for you.

There are three ways to treat symptoms associated with BPH. Your GP will guide you on the most appropriate treatment for you;

- Lifestyle changes and keeping an eye on your health;
- If your symptoms change, taking a medication to help with your symptoms;
- A surgical operation (called a TURP) or surgical laser treatment.

With any of these treatments you should notice an improvement in your symptoms.

Having an enlarged prostate (BPH) isn't the same as having prostate cancer and doesn't mean that there is a greater risk of getting prostate cancer.

*A leaflet on BPH is available on our website or by contacting us for a copy.*

## Prostatitis

Prostatitis means that there is inflammation, irritation or infection in the prostate. Prostatitis is the most common prostate problem.

It can affect men of all ages but is found most frequently in men between the ages of 30 – 50.

There are four different types of prostatitis. As well as the symptoms already given, when prostatitis develops suddenly it can cause severe pain, fever, chills and sweating. With this type of prostatitis it may mean urgent treatment in hospital.

Once your doctor has diagnosed your symptoms as prostatitis, there are many treatments available depending on the type of prostatitis you have.

It may be reassuring to know that prostatitis is not linked to prostate cancer and doesn't mean that there is a greater risk of getting prostate cancer.

*A leaflet on prostatitis is available on our website or by contacting us for a copy.*

## Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer happens when cells in the prostate grow faster than normal in an uncontrolled way. This causes a growth called a tumour. As the prostate is inside the body, this growth can't be seen and very often causes no symptoms in the early stages. Most prostate cancers grow slowly and for some men it doesn't have any effect on or shorten their life. However, for some men prostate cancer will need treated and there are many treatments available.

When prostate cancer is found at an early stage and contained inside the prostate the aim is to treat with a curative intent. If it's found at a later stage then treatments are aimed at controlling the cancer. This is why it's very important to make an appointment to see your GP if you are worried by any symptoms.

*A leaflet on prostate cancer is available on our website or by contacting us for a copy.*

## What should I do?

The most important thing you can do is to make an appointment to see your GP to find out what the problem might be and what can be done to help with your symptoms.

## What might happen at the doctors?

- The doctor will ask how you are feeling and about your symptoms; what they are, how long you have had them and if you think they are getting worse and may ask you to fill in a questionnaire. There is a *symptom self-test* on our website that you can do and print off and this may help you talk to your GP about your symptoms [www.prostatescotland.org.uk](http://www.prostatescotland.org.uk)
- Your doctor may ask for a urine sample to check it for blood, glucose (a type of sugar) or for any signs of infection in your bladder or kidneys
- Digital rectal examination (DRE). Your GP may want to check your prostate to find out it's size and shape and to feel for any lumps or hardened areas. To do this, your doctor will slide a gloved finger into your back passage. You might find this a bit uncomfortable but it shouldn't be painful and usually it doesn't take very long. Although, you may worry about this examination and may find it a bit embarrassing, your doctor has done this many times before and understands how you might be feeling
- PSA blood test. As a man gets older or if the prostate is damaged or enlarged then more PSA can leak out into the blood so giving a higher PSA level. Your doctor may recommend or want to do a PSA test. At the moment, the PSA test is the best test available to

check for any diseases in the prostate. However, it's not perfect. There are benefits but there are also drawbacks in having this test and you can discuss with your GP. The PSA test is best used as a guide for the doctor to make a diagnosis on what might be going on.

For more information on the PSA test, check out our website or our PSA leaflet or booklet to help you decide whether or not to have this test. Talking it over with your GP can also help.

Depending on the results of your tests and examinations with your GP, you may be referred to hospital to see a doctor who specialises in this type of condition called a Urologist. The Urologist may then want you to have more tests and examinations.

### **A word for partners, relatives and friends...**

If you are reading this leaflet thinking that you recognise the symptoms in someone close to you, then the sooner he is checked out the better.

- Persuade him to make an appointment to see his GP very soon or make it for him and go with him
- Encourage him to keep a diary of visits to the loo so he can tell the doctor about his symptoms and how much they are bothering him
- Get him to take the symptom self test on our website [www.prostatescotland.org.uk](http://www.prostatescotland.org.uk) [prostatescotland.org.uk](http://prostatescotland.org.uk)

The information contained in this leaflet has been developed by Prostate Scotland and reviewed by its Advisory Group of doctors, nurses and patients. This leaflet is not intended to replace medical advice or seeing a doctor for specific illnesses or symptoms.

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