

Benefits and Drawbacks of having a PSA test.

Look at the lists below, think about why **YOU** want to have a PSA test and write this down so you can tell your GP or Practice Nurse why you want to have a PSA test. You should let the GP know about any family history of prostate cancer and breast cancer or ovarian cancer with the faulty gene BRCA 1 and BRCA 2. Consider chatting to your wife, husband, partner, family or friends to help you make the decision.

BENEFITS

It is a simple and straight forward blood test that can be used as a guide to finding any disease in the Prostate.

It may lead to detection of prostate cancer before symptoms are apparent enabling treatment to start earlier if there is cancer in the prostate.

You will have your PSA level. This can be checked in future to see if the PSA level has gone up, ie to give you a baseline or benchmark your PSA level.

It can be used to check on those who have an increased risk of prostate cancer such as a brother or father having or having had prostate cancer or black men and those from an African Caribbean background.

If prostate cancer is diagnosed early then there are several treatments available to potentially cure prostate cancer.

Most men with early prostate cancer (cancer that is still contained in the prostate) do not have any symptoms at all.

DRAWBACKS

The test can give a raised level even though there is no cancer present, causing the family to worry and unnecessary hospital tests for you. This is called a false positive result.

The test can give a normal level and miss cancer so giving false reassurance. This is called a false negative result.

The test can indicate that there may be cancer in the prostate but can't tell if the cancer is slow growing or fast growing.

The test may pick up a slow growing cancer which would not cause any symptoms, shorten your life or affect the quality of your life but knowing that you have prostate cancer may cause worry.

Treatments for prostate cancer can cause side-effects with some impacting on the quality of your life.

If PSA is raised you might be referred to the urology clinic for an MRI scan or prostate biopsy. Prostate biopsy can have side-effects such as pain, bleeding and a risk of developing an infection.

What if my GP says 'No' to giving me a PSA test

Your GP may feel that in certain circumstances and for a small number of men having a PSA test may not be the best thing but he/she should explain why that is. If your GP refuses to give you a PSA test, and you are still concerned, you are entitled to ask them why. If you are still not satisfied with their answer you can always ask to speak to another GP or health care professional.

Guidance on PSA tests for GPs states "The PSA test is available to men who request it, including trans women and non-binary people".

If I go ahead, when can I expect to get the results of my PSA test?

The results can take up to 2 weeks to come back. Ask when you can expect to hear about the results of your test as this can be a worrying time for you and the family. Ask if you have to phone for the results or if you will be contacted directly.

What is a Digital Rectal Examination (DRE)?

Your GP, Urologist or Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) may give you the option of having a DRE. It is a straightforward procedure, only taking about 15-30 seconds to do. A DRE checks the size and condition of your prostate and for any hardened areas, odd shape or unusual lump. It is done to ensure that there are no concerns with how your prostate feels. For this, you will lie on your left side with knees bent to your chest. The doctor/CNS will slide a gloved finger into your back passage/rectum to check your prostate through the bowel wall. Although it might feel a bit uncomfortable, it shouldn't hurt.

You can refuse to have a DRE but chat over any concerns you have with your GP, Urologist or CNS. You may be asked if you would like a chaperone to be with you during the DRE or you can ask for the DRE to be done by a male doctor/CNS.

What next?

If your PSA is raised or your prostate felt unusual, then your GP may refer you to the urology department in hospital. This may lead to you having an MRI scan and possibly having a prostate biopsy.

What is an MRI scan?

An MRI scan uses high powdered magnets rather than x-rays to produce detailed pictures of your prostate, surrounding tissues, bones and other organs. It can show if the cancer has remained in the prostate or spread outside. These scan pictures can be used as a guide to target specific areas in the prostate when taking the small samples during a biopsy.

What is a prostate biopsy?

A biopsy means that several tiny samples are taken from target areas within the prostate using a special needle. These samples are looked at very carefully under a microscope for any signs of prostate cancer. For some having a biopsy and other tests then waiting for the results may cause worry and stress.

Are there any times when I shouldn't have the test done?

PSA levels can be affected by several things so may give a false high level of PSA in your blood. Let your doctor know if any of these apply to you and put off having the test to a later date:

- 👤 If you have an active or have had a recent urinary infection in the previous 6 weeks
- 👤 If you have ejaculated in the last 48 hours
- 👤 If you have exercised energetically in the last 48 hours
- 👤 If you have had a prostate biopsy in the last 6 weeks
- 👤 If you have had a DRE (Digital Rectal Examination) in the last week, although it can raise your PSA for longer
- 👤 If you have had a prostate massage
- 👤 If you have been the receiving partner of anal sex in the previous week.
- 👤 If you have had a urinary catheter in the last 6 weeks.
- 👤 Tell your doctor about any medications or herbal remedies eg saw palmetto that you are taking.

Making the decision that is right for me

- 👤 The right decision for you can be different from that made by a friend, relative, workmate or colleague.
- 👤 Think through all the benefits and draw-backs of having or indeed not having the test. Sometimes writing these down can help you to make up your mind. This might also help when you speak to your GP.
- 👤 Make sure your decision feels right for you.
- 👤 Speak to your spouse/partner too as they may have some thoughts on this.

Discussing the PSA test with your GP

Within the Prostate Cancer Risk Management pack, the guidance for GPs states that:

"The PSA test is available to men who request it, including trans women and non-binary people"

What does the PSA level tell GP/me?

To some extent this depends on your age and there are guidelines on the ranges that your GP may discuss with you.

As a man gets older more PSA leaks out into the bloodstream so the higher his PSA level is likely to be. The doctor will take this into account when looking at your results.

If the PSA level is not raised

The risk of cancer is low. However, another PSA test might be done at a later date. This is to make sure that the first test did not miss any cancer in the prostate.

If the PSA level is raised

The GP will chat this through with you and discuss the next steps. PSA can be raised for other reasons such as BPE, prostatitis and a urinary tract infection so it may not mean prostate cancer.

However, if your PSA is raised above a certain level, and your GP has any concerns, he/she may want to do a repeat PSA test rather than having a 'one off' PSA test.

Your GP may also want to physically examine your prostate by doing a Digital Rectal Examination or DRE. More information about this is given below.

If my PSA is raised who might I be referred to

The GP will most likely refer you to the urology department to have more tests done such as an mpMRI scan or prostate biopsy.

Questions you might like to think about to help you make your decision.

- 👤 Do I have any symptoms that I am concerned about?
- 👤 Am I the right age to have this done?
- 👤 Has my brother or father been diagnosed with prostate cancer?
- 👤 Has a close family blood relative been diagnosed with BRCA1/BRCA2 breast cancer or ovarian cancer at an early age?
- 👤 Would I prefer to know my PSA level?
- 👤 Will having a PSA test give me reassurance?
- 👤 Will having a PSA test cause me more worry than not having it?
- 👤 If a single PSA test is 'normal' would it reassure me only having the test once?
- 👤 If my PSA level is high would I be willing to have further tests?
- 👤 Have I spoken to my partner, friends, relatives or colleagues about their experiences/views on having a PSA test?
- 👤 Have I checked out all the information on PSA tests to help me make the decision?

Check our website
www.prostatescotland.org.uk
and other websites
for more information.