



# Having your Prostate Checked: A Guide

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed their advice and suggestions to develop this guide.

# Contents

Introduction.....	2
1. About the prostate.....	3
2. Health problems with the prostate .....	5
3. Getting your prostate checked .....	11
4. After your prostate check .....	18
5. Further information .....	20

# Introduction

This guide is for anyone who is thinking about having their prostate checked.

This booklet is for guidance only. Please contact your doctor for more information and advice.

## **A prostate check can include:**

- Questions about your health
- A Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test
- Having your prostate examined

We explain more about a check later in the guide.

It is your choice to have your prostate checked. Your doctor will help you decide.

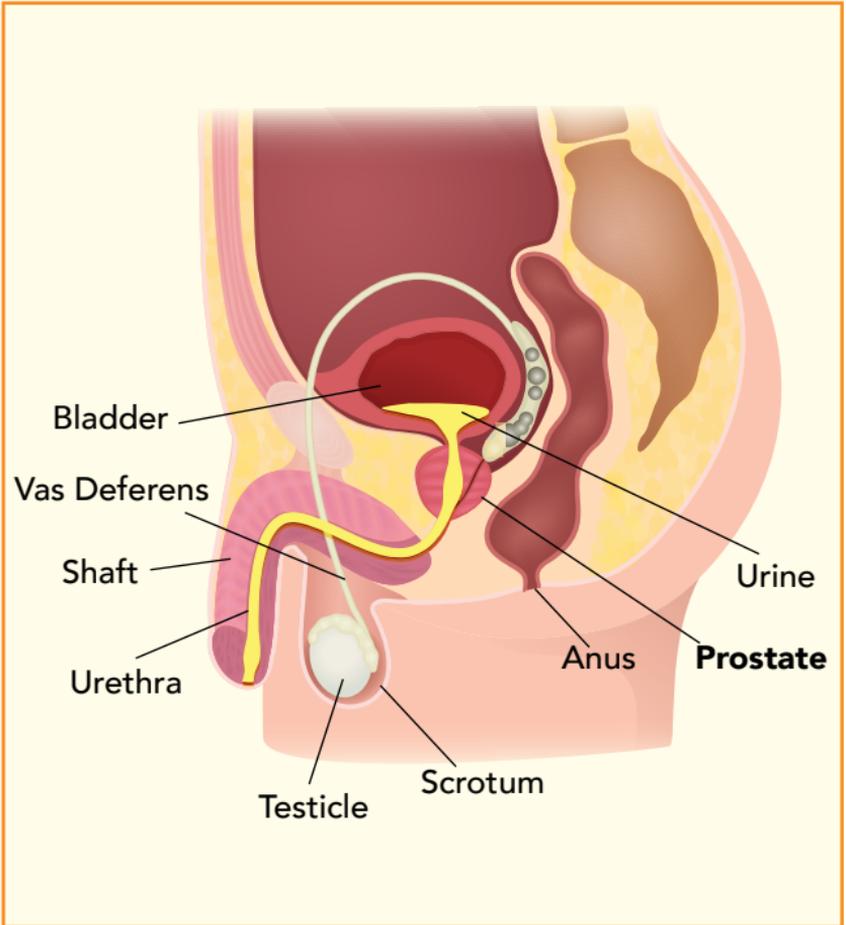
# 1. About the prostate

The prostate is a gland that lies just under the bladder (see Figure 1 on page 4). It is normally about the size of a golf ball and gets bigger as you get older.

The urethra runs through the middle of the prostate. The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body.

The prostate helps to make semen and aids fertility.

Figure 1 Male Urinary System



## 2. Health problems with the prostate

In this section, we tell you about the different health problems you can have with your prostate.

### **Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH)**

BPH is an enlarged prostate gland that usually occurs in people over 50 years of age. This is the most common health problem with the prostate. Benign means non-harmful.

You may have problems peeing if you have BPH. BPH is not a cancer and will not lead to cancer.

## Prostatitis

Prostatitis is an inflammation or infection of the prostate gland. You may have discomfort when you are peeing if you have Prostatitis. It can also make you feel unwell with pain and fever.

Prostatitis is not a cancer and will not lead to cancer.

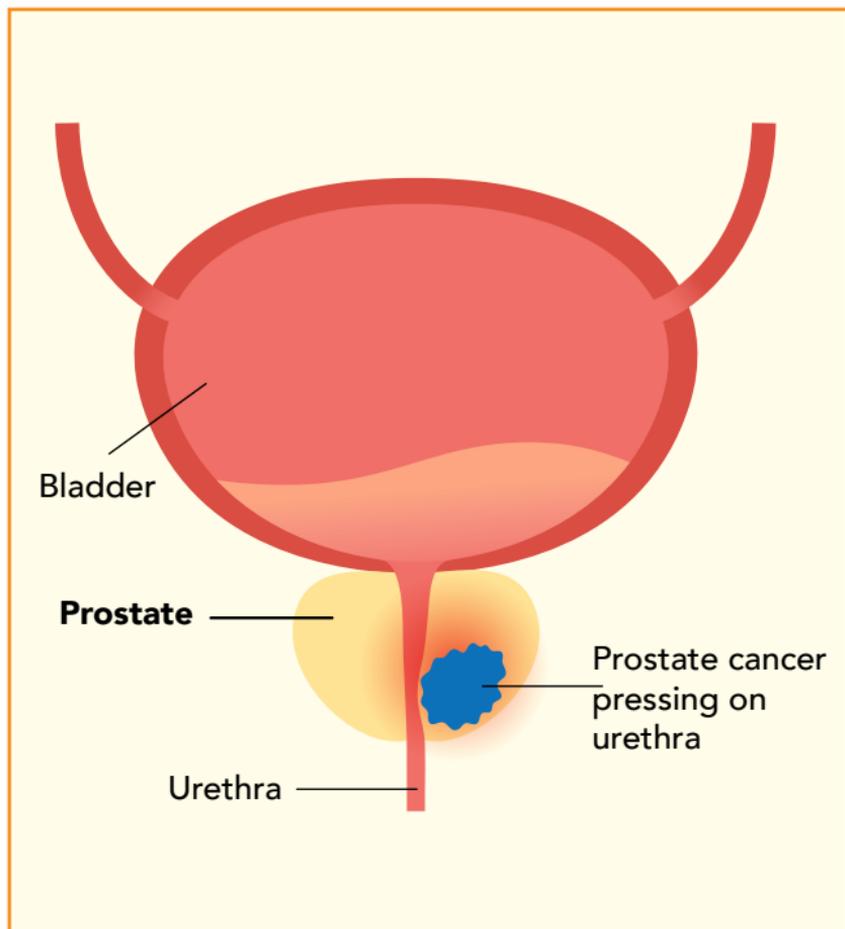
## Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in males in Ireland.

Most cases occur in people over 50 years of age.

Most cases of prostate cancer are not life threatening and many do not need any treatment. Of those cases that do need treatment most can be treated successfully when found early.

Figure 2 The prostate and cancer



## Symptoms of a health problem with your prostate

### You should contact your doctor if:

- you are peeing more often than usual
- you are getting up during the night to pee
- you have difficulty peeing
- your urine has a weaker flow than usual
- you feel as if you have not emptied your bladder fully
- you are straining to empty your bladder.

You should talk to your doctor about any of these symptoms so they can find out what is causing them.

Most people with these symptoms will not have prostate cancer.

## More serious symptoms

### Talk to your doctor without delay if:

- you have blood in your urine or semen
- you have unexplained back pain or bone pain
- you have unexplained significant weight loss
- you are feeling tired all the time and this is not normal for you.

It is important to get your doctor to check these more serious symptoms. They could be a sign of more serious illness.

## Who is most at risk from prostate cancer?

### The risk of prostate cancer increases:

- as you get older
- if you are of African ethnicity
- if you have family members diagnosed with prostate (father or brothers) or breast (mother or sister) cancer.

## 3. Getting your prostate checked

There are many reasons you might want to have your prostate checked. These include:

- You have symptoms, such as difficulty peeing, and you are worried that you might have prostate cancer
- You have no symptoms, but you are still worried that you might have prostate cancer
- You have a family history of prostate cancer
- Your family or friends have advised you to have your prostate checked.

You can discuss getting your prostate checked with your GP, and they will help you decide if you should have your prostate checked. This is called shared decision-making. It is your choice to have your prostate checked.

### You should discuss the following with your GP when deciding:

- your symptoms
- your age, ethnicity, family history and genetics
- the potential benefits and risks of having your prostate checked.

## What happens during a prostate check?

During your prostate check your doctor asks you questions about your health.

### You may also:

- be offered a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test
- have an examination called a Digital Rectal Examination (DRE).

We explain more about these tests below.

## Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) Blood Test

PSA is a protein made by the prostate, which can be measured in your blood.

The PSA blood test measures the level of PSA in your blood.

The PSA test is not a perfect test. Your PSA level can be raised when you do not have prostate cancer, and it can be normal even when you do have prostate cancer.

## Your levels of PSA can be affected:

- If you have Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) – a non-harmful (benign) enlargement of the prostate
- If you have Prostatitis, which is an inflammation of the prostate
- If you have a urinary tract infection
- If you are taking certain medication, such as steroids or medicines for BPH
- If you have ejaculated within 48 hours before the PSA blood test. You may be asked to avoid any sexual activity that leads to ejaculation in the 48 hours before the test
- If you have had anal sex or prostate stimulation in the week before your test. Receiving anal sex or having your prostate stimulated during sex might raise your PSA level for a while. You should avoid this for a week before the test.

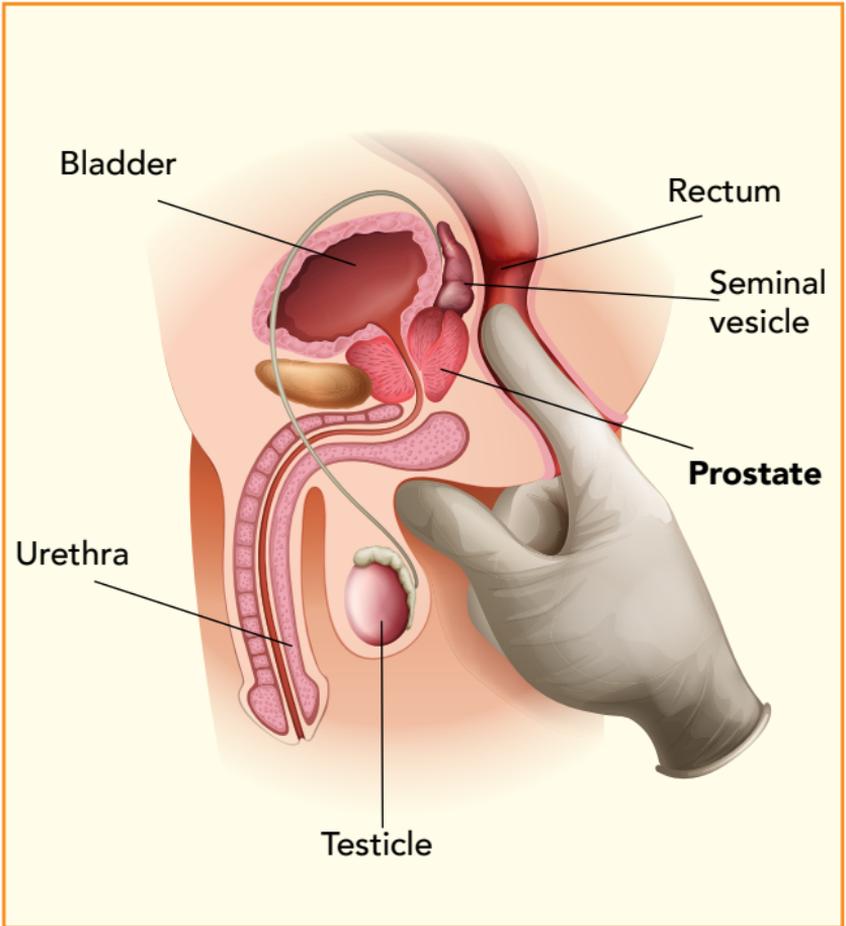
## You may need to wait six weeks to get a PSA test in the following situations:

- If you have had a prostate biopsy (sample of cells)
- If you have had any tests or surgery on your bladder or prostate
- If you have a urinary catheter (a tube that drains urine from your bladder).

## Digital Rectal Examination (DRE)

To examine the prostate, your doctor may feel the prostate gland through the back passage (rectum) with a gloved finger. This is called a DRE (Digital Rectal Examination). You may find this uncomfortable or embarrassing, but it should not be painful. A prostate gland that feels large or bumpy could be a sign of prostate cancer.

## Figure 3 A Digital Rectal Examination



## Benefits of having your prostate checked

Having your prostate checked can help to find cancer at an early stage. This means you can get treatment as soon as possible.

## Risks of having your prostate checked

Finding a prostate cancer that would never have caused you any symptoms or shortened your life.

Causing you to feel anxious and worried that you may have prostate cancer.

Treating prostate cancer may cause side effects.

## 4. After your prostate check

It is important to contact your doctor for your PSA blood test result.

### If your prostate check is not normal:

- Your doctor will discuss this with you.
- You may need another PSA blood test in 6–12 weeks.
- You may be referred to one of the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) Rapid Access Prostate Clinics where your prostate can be assessed further.
- You may be referred to a doctor who is an expert in treating prostate problems. This expert is known as a 'urologist'.
- Your urologist may suggest further tests to see if you need more treatment.

### These tests could include:

- an MRI scan
- taking a sample of tissue to analyse (biopsy).

### If your prostate check is normal:

- Talk to your doctor about what your results mean for you.
- Continue to take care of your health.
- Get in touch with your doctor if you have any new symptoms or concerns.

## 5. Further information

### 10 tips to reduce your cancer risk

There are lots of things you can do to improve your health.

1		<p><b>Eat a healthy balanced diet.</b></p> <p>Eating a healthy balanced diet can help you maintain a healthy body weight and reduce your cancer risk. For more information visit <a href="http://www.gov.ie/healthyireland">www.gov.ie/healthyireland</a></p>
2		<p><b>Be physically active.</b></p> <p>Doing any amount of physical activity benefits health.</p>
3		<p><b>Don't smoke.</b></p> <p>The best form of defence is not to start smoking. If you do smoke quitting reduces your cancer risk. For help quitting, visit <a href="http://www.quit.ie">www.quit.ie</a> or call 1800 201 203.</p>

4		<p><b>Reduce alcohol intake.</b></p> <p>Try to cut down your alcohol intake, or avoid alcohol completely. Visit <a href="http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie">www.askaboutalcohol.ie</a></p>
5		<p><b>Keep weight within a healthy range.</b></p> <p>Eating a healthy balanced diet, being physically active, getting enough sleep and taking care of your mental health can all help to maintain a healthy body weight.</p> <p>Support options are available to people who are overweight or who are very overweight (obese). Ask your GP for information.</p>

6		<p><b>Be SunSmart.</b></p> <p>Slip on clothing, Put on sunscreen using factor 30+ for adults.</p> <p>Slap on a wide-brimmed hat.</p> <p>Seek shade and slide on sunglasses.</p> <p>Visit <a href="http://www.hse.ie/SunSmart">www.hse.ie/SunSmart</a></p>
7		<p><b>Get screened.</b></p> <p>Consider taking part in the screening programme for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– bowel cancer (people aged 59-69 years).</li></ul> <p>Visit <a href="http://www.bowelscreen.ie">www.bowelscreen.ie</a></p>

8	 A circular green sign with a white border. Inside the circle is a black radiation symbol (a triangle with three dots) and the text "RADON GAS" below it.	<p><b>Know about radon gas.</b></p> <p>Find out if radon levels are high in your area and what to do about them if they are. Visit <a href="http://www.radon.ie">www.radon.ie</a></p>
9	 A circular green sign with a white border. Inside the circle is a person wearing a yellow hard hat, a white face mask, and an orange high-visibility safety vest over a dark shirt and blue pants.	<p><b>Follow workplace health and safety instructions.</b></p> <p>Some workplaces involve exposure to cancer-causing substances such as asbestos and formaldehyde.</p> <p>Always follow health and safety instructions</p>
10	 <p data-bbox="194 1224 428 1282">National Cancer Control Programme</p>	<p>More information is available at <a href="http://www.hse.ie/cancerprevention">www.hse.ie/cancerprevention</a></p>

If you would like copies of this guide, contact the Health promotion (contact details below).

**Email:** [info@cancercontrol.ie](mailto:info@cancercontrol.ie)

**Visit:** [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie).

## Abbreviations in this guide

Abbreviations	Details
BPH	Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia
DRE	Digital Rectal Examination
GP	General Practitioner
NCCP	National Cancer Control Programme
PSA	Prostate Specific Antigen









If you wish to order printed resources, please visit [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie) and choose 'cancer' on the drop down menu.

National Cancer Control Programme  
King's Inns House  
200 Parnell Street  
Dublin 1  
DO1 A3Y8

[info@cancercontrol.ie](mailto:info@cancercontrol.ie)  
[www.hse.ie/cancer](http://www.hse.ie/cancer)

© National Cancer Control Programme  
Artwork No: NCCP-COM-061-2  
Produced by: HSE NCCP  
Print Date: October 2023  
Review Date: October 2026  
Product Code: HCC01597  
Health Promotion No: HCC01597

