

Title: Prostate-specific antigen is not an effective screening test for prostate cancer

Author: Philip Barbosa

Date: 2.2.2010

Key words: PSA, screening harm, prostate cancer

Abstract:

There is not enough evidence to make definitive recommendations for PSA as a screening tool for men younger than 75 years. In depth discussion regarding patient's definition of quality of life is necessary to address the potential risks and benefits of screening and potential disease. This includes both psychological effects of false positive test as well as physiological side effects of surgery. It is likely that many more years of data will be necessary to correctly evaluate current effectiveness of monitoring protocols. It is necessary to note that PSA screening alone can have serious psychological effects on patients no matter the result.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

WHAT

What is Prostate Cancer?

The most common non-skin cancer in men and second most common cause of cancer death.

What is PSA?

It is made by the prostate and stands for “Prostate-specific antigen”. It is high in certain prostate diseases like infection and cancer.

What are other tests for Prostate cancer?

- “Digital rectal exam” described later
- Prostate ultrasound
- Prostate biopsy, often done in concordance with ultrasound

Screening for Prostate Cancer

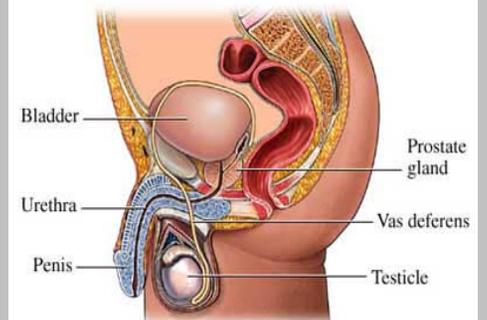
An introduction for an informed conversation with your health care provider

WHERE

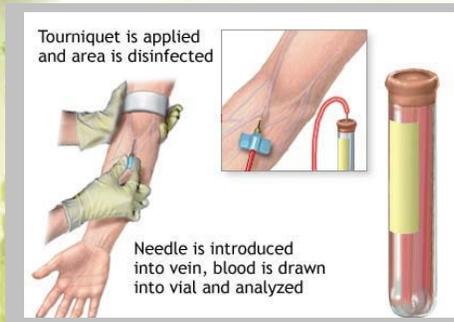
Your prostate is a gland that sits under the bladder, in front of the rectum and around the urethra.

Cancer can sometimes be felt with your doctor’s finger through the wall of your intestine.

Men should have a yearly prostate exam starting at age 50 or earlier if your doctor believes it is necessary.



HOW



Normal blood draw

Blood is taken from a vein and then tested for the PSA protein.

A number comes back and a cut off of 4.0 or below is considered normal. However, other factors can cause a temporary high number like a recent prostate exam or infection.

WHO

Who is at higher risk for cancer?

- Men with parents or siblings with prostate cancer
- African Americans
- Older men

Who should not get tested?

If you are older than 75 years old, it is not recommended to be screened.

Are there risks of PSA screening?

Yes. Tests can return positive when actually there is no cancer. This can cause emotional harm and physical harm with follow up testing.

Even if cancer is found, some people may think that the side effects of prostate surgery are worse than living with a cancer.

WHY



In the end, the decision is yours to make. There is no “one right answer” and not everyone will want PSA screening. Only you, with the help of your doctor can decide if the risk of screening is more than the risk of cancer.

We hope this has helped you make a more informed choice.