



# PROSTATE CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 5

The prostate is a sex gland in men. It produces a thick fluid that mixes with sperms to form semen. It is located below the bladder and in front of the rectum. The urethra runs through the centre of the prostate.

Prostate cancer results from abnormal growth of cells in the prostate. Some prostate cancers grow slowly and may not affect the health of the patient while some grow rapidly and spread to other parts of the body leading to death.

## Am I at risk of prostate cancer?

The causes for prostate cancer are not yet fully understood. However, there are several risk factors for prostate cancer including:

- Age: prostate cancer happens mostly in older men and is rarely found in men below the age of 50
- Family history of prostate cancer, especially in first-degree relatives (father, brother or son)
- Ethnicity or race: prostate cancer is more common in African American men
- Obesity (increases the risk of advanced prostate cancer)

## What are the common symptoms of prostate cancer?

Early prostate cancer may have no symptoms, so they often go unnoticed. Common symptoms of prostate cancer include difficulty or delay in urination, slow or weak stream of urine, urinary frequency especially at night, blood in urine and pain in the lower back, pelvis and hips.

However, most of these symptoms are very similar to those of benign prostatic hyperplasia which is not cancer. You should consult a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any of the above symptoms.



## How to reduce the chance of getting prostate cancer?

In general, adopting healthy lifestyle may lower cancer risk:

- Have regular physical activities
- Maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference
- Have well balanced diet
- Avoid smoking and alcohol consumption



## What is prostate cancer screening?

The purpose of prostate cancer screening is to detect prostate cancer before it gives rise to symptoms, so that early treatment can be initiated.

Two common screening tests for prostate cancer are digital rectal examination and prostate-specific antigen test. If the screening test is abnormal, further diagnostic investigation is needed.

## • Digital rectal examination (DRE)

DRE is an examination performed by a doctor who will put a gloved finger into your back passage to feel the back portion of the prostate to determine whether the prostate is abnormal.

## • Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test

PSA is a protein produced by prostate glands and released into the blood. PSA test measures the level of PSA in the blood.

In general, the probability of prostate cancer increases with PSA level in the blood. However, the majority of men with raised PSA level do not have prostate cancer. This is because several abnormal prostate conditions which are not cancer, for example benign prostate hyperplasia, prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) can also cause an increase in the blood PSA level.

## Should I get screened ?

DRE and PSA test have their limitations and they are not 100% accurate. You should discuss with your doctor about the benefits and potential risks about screening to make an informed choice.

At present, there is insufficient scientific evidence to recommend for or against population-based prostate cancer screening for asymptomatic men in Hong Kong.

Men at **increased risk** of prostate cancer (e.g. with first-degree relative diagnosed with prostate cancer before age of 65) should consult doctors about their screening need and approach. In general, the PSA test should start at an age not earlier than 45 until age 70, and the interval should not be more frequent than once every two years.



Department of Health