



# Should you get the PSA test?

New research is changing how providers use the PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test. It's not a regular test that you'll get automatically at your checkup — now, you have to decide if you want it. **Talk it over with your provider during your appointment.**



### What's the PSA test?

It's a blood test. It checks for levels of protein (prostate-specific antigen) made by a man's prostate. Sometimes a high level may indicate an increased risk of prostate cancer.



### What do I do?

Talk about the test with your doctor. Learn about the possible benefits and harms, and about your individual risk for prostate cancer. Then decide if the test is right for you.



### What's the Problem?

If you have a high PSA level, the next steps might be biopsy and treatment for cancer. These may not be necessary.

## Before you talk to your provider

Start by answering a few questions. Then learn more about the PSA test on the back of this sheet.

Do you have risk factors for prostate cancer? For instance:

1. Has anyone in your family had prostate cancer?

(circle all that apply)

Yes                      No  
 Father                  Brother                  Son  
 Grandfather          Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you African-American or black?

Yes                      No

3. Have you previously had a high PSA level?

Yes                      No                      I don't know

Other factors to consider:

4. How concerned are you about getting prostate cancer?

Very                      Somewhat                  Not Very

5. When you make a decision about your health, do you talk it over with anyone first — like your wife, partner, or friends? Who? (write your answer in the space to the right)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. How would you describe yourself?

(circle one)

I like to get all the medical tests I can — it gives me peace of mind.

I take things as they come and am not likely to request tests unless my provider recommends them.

# Frequently Asked Questions about the PSA test

## If the PSA test can tell me if I'm at risk for prostate cancer, why wouldn't I want the test?

The PSA test can't tell you for sure if you have prostate cancer. Lots of things can cause a high PSA level. Cancer is just one of them. The only way to know if you have prostate cancer is to get a biopsy.

## So what are the benefits of getting the PSA test?

A high PSA could be a sign of a dangerous type of cancer. The test could help you catch it early, when it may be easiest to cure.

## Besides a high PSA level, what raises my risk of prostate cancer?

If you have a family history of prostate cancer — especially if your brother or father had it — your risk is 2 to 3 times higher. If you're African-American or black, your risk is 50% higher. The risk of prostate cancer also goes up with age, especially after age 50.

## But the PSA is just a blood test — why not get it to be safe?

The test itself is easy. The harms come afterward. If you get a high result, **the test can't tell you if the cause is cancer or something else**. So to be sure, you would get more tests or a biopsy of the prostate. A biopsy positive for prostate cancer could lead to treatment — radiation or surgery — that may not provide you with any benefit. The treatment may cause immediate complications and may leave you with lasting side effects.

## What side effects could the PSA test lead to?

Some men who get treatment have problems urinating — they may leak or lose bladder control. They might have sexual problems — like impotence (trouble getting hard during sex). Rarely, men have more serious problems, like infections, blood clots, or heart attacks.

## How do I decide?

We can't give you an easy answer. Providers are still studying the best way to use the PSA test. **But don't ignore the issue**. Learn more about the test. Talk to your provider, your family, and friends. Decide what's right for you.

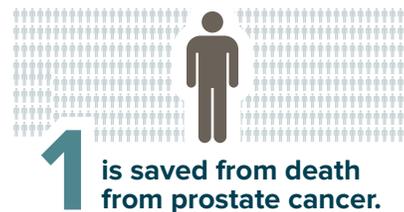
Learn more about PSA testing at: [www.mass.gov/cancerscreenings](http://www.mass.gov/cancerscreenings)

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## The PSA test has benefits **and** risks:

According to one study  
out of every  
**1000**  
men who get the PSA test

over 10 years:



**30 or more**

will get diagnosed with prostate cancer and may get treatment that causes harm **and does not provide any benefit**.

➔ **Side effects** from treatment can include:



**Incontinence**  
(leaking urine and having accidents)



**Impotence**  
(trouble staying hard during sex)



**Blood Clots and Heart Attacks**

It's not a **simple decision**. But it's an **important one**.

Talk to your provider



**Make your own choice.**