

Potential benefits and risks of PSA testing

Having the PSA test

Not having the PSA test

Health



If you have the PSA test and follow-on treatment you are less likely to die of prostate cancer than men who do not have the test. Having an abnormal PSA test result means you may be offered further tests and treatments, which may harm your health.

If you do not have the PSA test you are more likely to die of prostate cancer than men who do have the PSA test. You are also more likely to experience the complications of advanced incurable prostate cancer.

Test results



The PSA test may reassure you if the result is normal. But it can miss cancer and provide false reassurance.

If you have prostate cancer, you are more likely to be diagnosed and treated early. But an abnormal test result may also lead to unnecessary worry and medical tests when there is no cancer.

The test cannot tell the difference between fast-growing cancers and slow-growing cancers that may not cause symptoms or shorten your life.

If you do not have the PSA test you may avoid unnecessary worry and tests after an abnormal result when there is either no cancer or a slow-growing cancer.

If you have prostate cancer, you are less likely to be diagnosed and treated early.

Accuracy



About 75 out of every 100 men who have an abnormal PSA test result do not have prostate cancer. This is called a false positive result. About 15 out of every 100 men who have a normal PSA test result do have prostate cancer. This is called a false negative result.

If you do not have a PSA test, you will not get a false positive or a false negative result but the chance of early detection may be missed.

Follow-up



About 17 out of every 100 men who are tested have an abnormal test result. About 82 out of every 100 men who have an abnormal result will have a biopsy. Some men have problems or complications after a biopsy for prostate cancer. The most common complications are bleeding and infections.

If you do not have a PSA test, it is unlikely you will need to have a biopsy unless you get symptoms of prostate cancer, at which stage the cancer might be more advanced.

Treatment



If you are diagnosed with prostate cancer, you will need to decide about treatment. Potential treatments can include surgery, radiotherapy and hormone therapy. Side effects of treatments for prostate cancer can include problems with erections, loss of fertility and incontinence.

If you choose not to have a PSA test, it is unlikely you will need treatment for prostate cancer, unless you get symptoms. This means you are less likely to have any complications from treatments.