

# Should I get screened for Prostate Cancer?

Eric North MD

There is no “right” answer on whether to perform a prostate screening antigen (PSA) test as part of your annual wellness checkup.

## Pros of PSA screening

PSA screening may help you detect prostate cancer early.

Cancer is easier to treat and is more likely to be cured if it's diagnosed in the early stages of the disease.

PSA testing can be done with a simple, widely available blood test.

For some men, knowing is better than not knowing. Having the test can provide you with a certain amount of reassurance — either that you probably don't have prostate cancer or that you do have it and can now have it treated.

## Cons of PSA screening

Some prostate cancers are slow growing and never spread beyond the prostate gland.

Not all prostate cancers need treatment. Treatment for prostate cancer may have risks and side effects, including urinary incontinence, erectile dysfunction or bowel dysfunction.

PSA tests aren't foolproof. It's possible for your PSA levels to be elevated when cancer isn't present, and to not be elevated when cancer is present.

A diagnosis of prostate cancer can provoke anxiety and confusion. Concern that the cancer may not be life-threatening can make decision making complicated.

Thoughts from Dr Eric: This screening test is controversial because sometimes the treatment is worse than the disease. If you have a family member that had prostate cancer at a young age, screening makes sense to me. For everyone else, ask yourself the following hypothetical question:

If I were diagnosed with prostate cancer, would I want to surgically treat it if:

- 1) There was less than 1% chance I would die from it\*
- 2) There was a 50% chance I would experience a life-long side effect from the surgical treatment such as erectile dysfunction and/or urinary incontinence\*

If you answer “no” to the above hypothetical situation, you might consider skipping prostate screening. Keep in mind this is based on our current data and this research may change over the next ten years. If you are uncomfortable with not getting screened, then get the test done. I believe in the proverb “A heart at peace gives life to the body”. In general, I discourage prostate screening in men over age 70 because this population is more likely to experience complications and are less likely to receive benefit from treatment.

Information from [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com) and National Cancer Institute

\*Based on USPSTF statistics