

## What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer occurs when abnormal cells within the prostate grow in an uncontrolled way.

## What are the symptoms of prostate cancer?

The most common symptoms of prostate cancer are:

- ▶ pain or burning during urination<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ blood in the urine – this is called haematuria
- ▶ blood in the semen<sup>1</sup> – this is called haematospermia
- ▶ persistent pain in the back, hips, or pelvis<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ pain during ejaculation.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of conditions that may cause these symptoms, not just prostate cancer. If any of these symptoms are experienced, it is important that they are discussed with a doctor.

## What are the risk factors for prostate cancer?

A risk factor is any factor that is associated with an increased chance of developing a particular health condition, such as prostate cancer. There are different types of risk factors, some of which can be modified and some which cannot.

It should be noted that having one or more risk factors does not mean a person will develop prostate cancer. Many people have at least one risk factor but will never develop prostate cancer, while others with prostate cancer may have had no known risk factors. Even if a person with prostate cancer has a risk factor, it is usually hard to know how much that risk factor contributed to the development of their disease.

While the causes of prostate cancer are not fully understood, there are a number of factors associated with the risk of developing the disease. These factors include:

- ▶ increasing age<sup>2,3</sup>
- ▶ a strong family history of prostate cancer.<sup>2,3</sup>

## How is prostate cancer diagnosed?

A number of tests may be performed to investigate symptoms of prostate cancer and confirm a diagnosis. Some of the more common tests include:

- ▶ a digital rectal examination (DRE)<sup>1,3</sup>
- ▶ a blood test to measure levels of prostate specific antigen (PSA)<sup>1,3</sup>
- ▶ imaging of the prostate, which may include transrectal ultrasound, computed tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)<sup>1,3</sup>
- ▶ taking a sample of tissue (biopsy) from the prostate for examination under a microscope.<sup>1,3</sup>

## Treatment Options

Treatment and care of people with cancer is usually provided by a team of health professionals – called a multidisciplinary team.

Treatment for prostate cancer depends on the stage of the disease, the severity of symptoms and the person's general health. For some men with small, low-grade prostate cancers, treatment will not be recommended. These men will be offered active surveillance with regular PSA monitoring and repeat biopsies to check the growth of the prostate cancer. Treatment may be offered later if needed.<sup>4</sup>

Treatment options for prostate cancer can include surgery to remove the prostate, radiotherapy and/ or hormonal therapy (also called androgen deprivation therapy) to destroy cancer cells.<sup>2,4</sup>

Research is ongoing to find new ways to diagnose and treat different types of cancer. Some people may be offered the option of participation in a clinical trial to test new ways of treating prostate cancer.

### Finding support

People often feel overwhelmed, scared, anxious and upset after a diagnosis of cancer. These are all normal feelings.

Having practical and emotional support during and after diagnosis and treatment for cancer is very important. Support may be available from family and friends, health professionals or special support services.

In addition, State and Territory Cancer Councils provide general information about cancer as well as information on local resources and relevant support groups.

The Cancer Council Helpline can be accessed from anywhere in Australia by calling **13 11 20** for the cost of a local call.

More information about finding support can be found on the Cancer Australia website [www.canceraustralia.gov.au](http://www.canceraustralia.gov.au) or Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia [www.prostate.org.au](http://www.prostate.org.au)

### References

1. National Cancer Institute. Prostate cancer treatment (PDQ) – patient version. Available from <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/treatment/prostate/Patient>. [Accessed July 2012].
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4. Duchesne G. Localised prostate cancer: current treatment options. *Australian Family Physician* 2011; 40(10): 768–771.

