**Men: protect that prostate**

*Male?*

*Over the age of 50?*

*(Or 40 with a family history of prostate cancer?)*

*If you answered ‘yes’, then this article is for you.*

As we age and global life expectancies increase, we are all at greater risk of developing chronic conditions. Among these for men is prostate cancer which occurs in the prostate gland, a small gland found just below the bladder. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that prostate cancer is one of the most common cancers among men worldwide[[1]](#footnote-1) – with your biggest risk factor being age. In 2020, the International Agency for Research on Cancer reported around 1.4 million new cases of prostate cancer globally[[2]](#footnote-2).

Apart from age, there are several other risk factors. Some of these you can’t change like your family history, race (men of Caribbean and African origin are at greater risk) and genetic factors. The good news is that many of the other risk factors are in your control. These are based on our behaviours. You increase your risk of prostate cancer when you have a poor diet (too much red meat and not enough fruits and vegetables) and lead a poor lifestyle such as smoking, obesity and a lack of exercise.

Dr Deepak Patel, Vitality South Africa Clinician says that data from Discovery South Africa[[3]](#footnote-3) shows that prostate cancer screening rates have been increasing year-on-year. “This is great to see and something we continue to encourage at Vitality,” he says. “Certain prostate cancers grow extremely slowly and may not cause symptoms or problems for years, which is why screening tests are important. If it is caught early, while still confined to the prostate gland, this type of cancer can be cured.”

**Screenings before symptoms**

In the early stages, prostate cancer often does not cause noticeable symptoms – making it even more dangerous if undetected. But, as the disease progresses you may experience[[4]](#footnote-4):

* Urinary problems such as frequent urination, weak urine flow or blood in the urine
* Erectile dysfunction
* Pain or discomfort in the pelvic area
* Bone pain

Because prostate cancer is so treatable, especially when detected at an early stage which allows for timely treatment and better outcomes, Dr Deepak recommends annual checks when you’re over the age of 50, or if you’re 40+ with family history of prostate cancer.

**There are two types of prostate screening:**

1. Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) test

This is a blood test which measures the level of PSA (a protein made in the prostate) in the blood. As a rule, the higher the PSA level in the blood = the more likely a prostate problem exists[[5]](#footnote-5). But, there are other factors that could contribute to this including certain medical procedures, medications and infections. It is for this reason that the PSA test is not used alone to make a diagnosis. Your doctor may also use a digital rectal exam test for a better sense of your overall prostate health.

1. Digital Rectal Examination (DRE)

The DRE is a physical exam used to help your doctor feel for changes in your prostate. During this test, the doctor feels for an abnormal shape, consistency, nodularity or thickness in the gland[[6]](#footnote-6). Together, the PSA and DRE can help to find prostate cancer early, before it spreads. “While the thought of this type of test might not be pleasant, the examination itself is quick and painless,” Dr Patel stresses.

Vitality recommends men screen for prostate cancer by going for regular check-ups with your doctor. They can monitor your overall health, assess any potential symptoms or concerns and discuss your specific needs for additional screenings where necessary.

**Dr Patel’s concluding message is clear:**

Don’t fear the unknown. Get checked and take control of your health.

*For more information about Vitality’s evidence-based approach that encourages and rewards members for healthier living, visit the*[*Vitality Global*](https://www.vitalityglobal.com/)*website.*

1. CDC. Prostate cancer statistics. [Link](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/prostate/statistics/index.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. World Cancer Research Fund International. Prostate cancer statistics. [Link](https://www.wcrf.org/cancer-trends/prostate-cancer-statistics/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Discovery. Post-COVID screening. [Link](https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/health-insights-types-of-cancer-screening-rates) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mayo Clinic. Prostate cancer. [Link](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prostate-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20353087) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. National Cancer Institute. PSA test. [Link](https://www.cancer.gov/types/prostate/psa-fact-sheet#:~:text=the%20PSA%20test%3F-,What%20is%20the%20PSA%20test%3F,to%20a%20laboratory%20for%20analysis.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. National Cancer Institute. Understanding prostate changes. [Link](https://www.cancer.gov/types/prostate/understanding-prostate-changes#:~:text=Digital%20Rectal%20Exam%20(DRE)&text=With%20a%20gloved%20and%20lubricated,the%20prostate%20from%20the%20rectum.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)