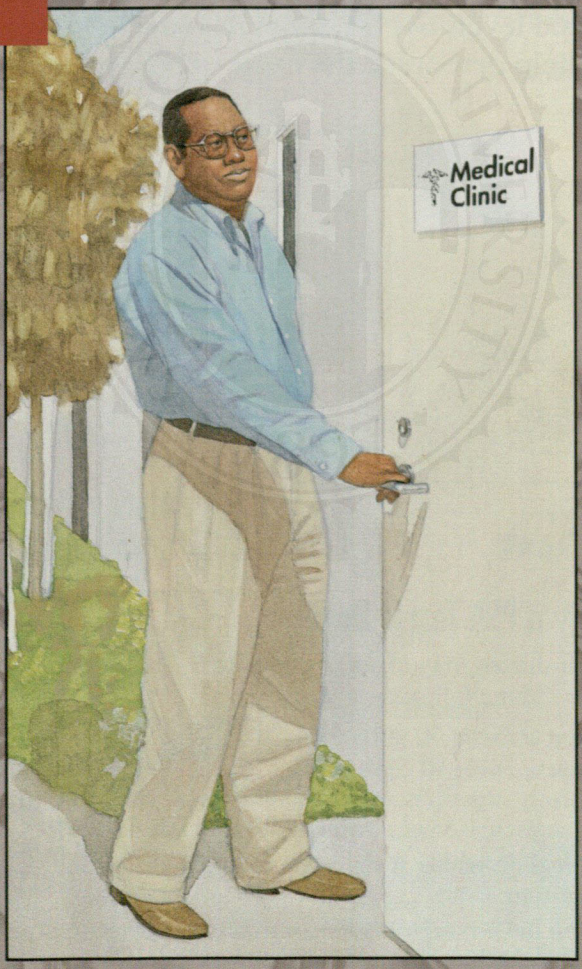
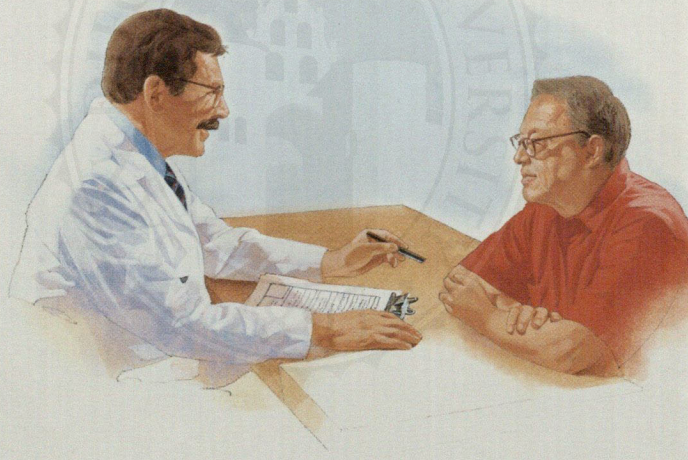
PSA Test

Screening for Prostate Cancer



A SCREENING TEST

The **prostate specific antigen (PSA) test** is a blood test used to help in the early detection of prostate cancer. PSA, an ingredient of semen, is made by the prostate. Some PSA naturally leaks from the prostate into the bloodstream. The PSA test measures the amount of PSA in the blood. As a man ages, more PSA leaks into the blood. Problems with the prostate—such as prostatitis (prostate infection), BPH (benign prostatic enlargement), or cancer—may cause extra PSA to enter the blood. A digital rectal exam or prostate biopsy can also raise PSA levels. If a PSA test shows higher than normal blood levels of PSA, other tests are necessary to help determine the cause of the increase.



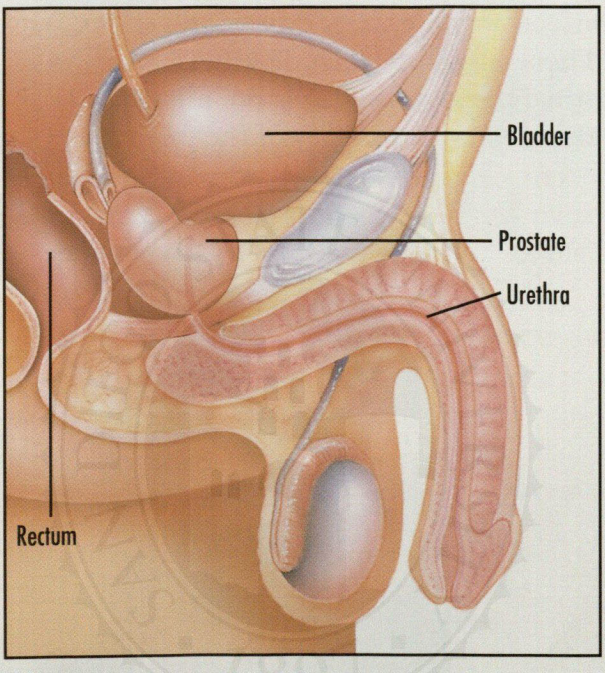
Why a PSA Test Is Done

Your doctor may recommend a PSA test for one or more of the following reasons:

- You are over 50 years old.
- You are over 40 years old and African-American or have family members who've had prostate cancer (factors that increase your own risk for prostate cancer).
- An abnormality is detected during your routine prostate exam.
- You have symptoms that may suggest prostate problems, such as frequent urination (especially at night), urgent urination, having to strain when urinating, blood in your urine, or pain.

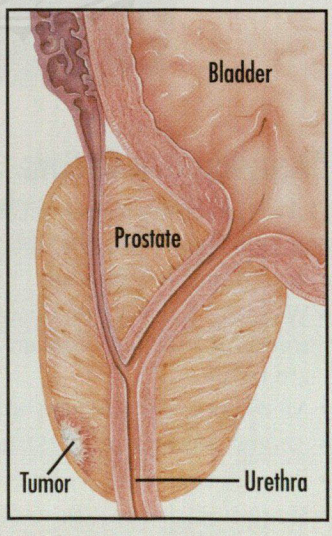
YOUR PROSTATE GLAND

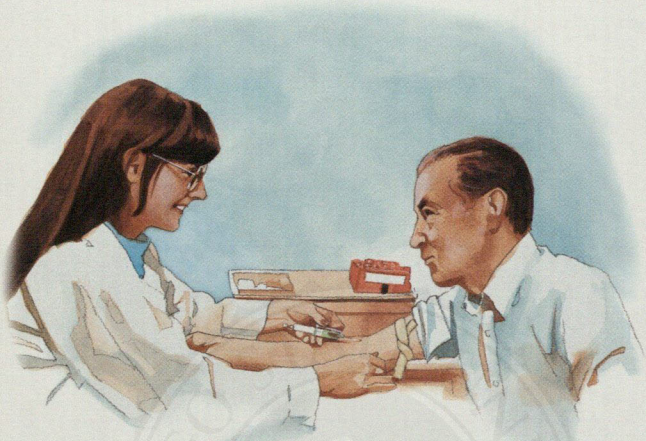
The **prostate** is a small gland lying just below the bladder and in front of the rectum. The prostate wraps around the **urethra,** the tube that carries urine from the bladder. Your prostate produces some of your **semen,** the fluid that carries sperm.



When There's a Problem

If cells in the prostate change abnormally, cancer may form. Prostate cancer often causes no symptoms unless the growth presses on the urethra. This is why screening tests are important.





How It's Done

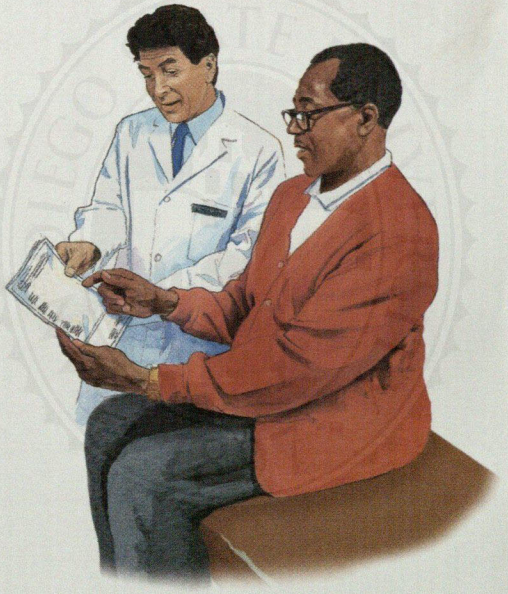
If your doctor recommends a PSA test, a routine prostate exam has probably been done first. Then you'll be sent to have your blood drawn for the PSA test. The test is done at a blood drawing station—usually in the doctor's office or at a lab, clinic, or hospital. Blood is taken from your arm and sent to a laboratory for evaluation.

Getting Your Results

The time it takes to get your test results varies from lab to lab. Ask your doctor when you can expect them. When the results return, you and your doctor can discuss what they mean. A normal range for your PSA depends on a number of factors. These include your age, the size of your prostate, your risk factors for cancer, your symptoms, and the results of your previous PSA tests, if any. These factors are taken into account when your PSA test numbers are interpreted and evaluated.

FOLLOW-UP

If test results show that your prostate is healthy, your doctor can use this information to help monitor for changes that may happen in the future. If your PSA level is higher than your normal range, your doctor may recommend more testing to determine whether your elevated PSA level is due to infection, an enlarged prostate, or cancer. These tests may include other blood tests, urinalysis and urine culture, ultrasound examination, or biopsy of the prostate.



Discussing Your Options

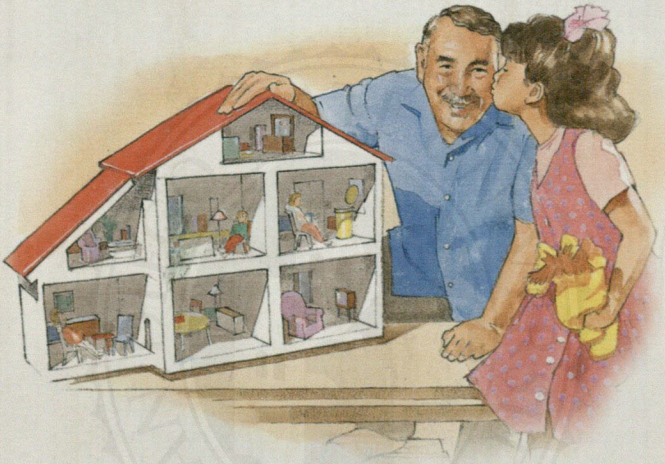
Once a specific prostate problem is identified, you and your doctor can talk about how best to treat it. Your options may include:

- Watchful waiting (your condition is closely monitored for a while before any specific treatments are tried)
- Medications for infection or BPH (enlarged prostate)
- Surgery to remove part of an enlarged prostate
- Surgery to remove a cancerous prostate
- Radiation therapy, hormone therapy, or other treatments for prostate cancer

FOR YOUR HEALTH

Even if your PSA level is not higher than normal, continue to have regular prostate exams. The American Cancer Society and the American Urological Association recommend:

- Yearly PSA tests for all men over the age of 50
- Yearly PSA tests for men over age 40 who are African-American or who have a family history of prostate cancer



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