



WHAT IS PROSTATE CANCER?

Cancer occurs when cells in the body begin changing and multiplying out of control. These cells can form lumps of tissue called tumors. Cancer that starts in the prostate is called prostate cancer. Cancer can grow and spread beyond the prostate, threatening health and life.

Understanding the Prostate

The prostate is a gland about the size and shape of a walnut. It surrounds the upper part of the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder, in men. The prostate produces most of the semen in which sperm travel. During orgasm, semen exits the body through the urethra.

When Prostate Cancer Forms

As a man ages, the cells of his prostate may change to form tumors or other growths. Some growths may be benign (not cancerous), but might still cause problems. Other growths may be cancerous:

- **Noncancerous growths.** As a man ages, the prostate may grow larger. This condition is called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). With BPH, extra prostate tissue often squeezes the urethra, causing symptoms such as difficulty urinating. But BPH does NOT lead to cancer.
- **Atypical cells (prostatic intraepithelial neoplasia, or PIN).** Some cells don't appear as typical, normal prostate cells. Although they are not cancer cells, they may indicate that cancer is likely to form.
- **Cancer.** When abnormal prostate cells grow uncontrolled and start invading other tissues, they are called cancer cells. These cells may or may not produce symptoms. Some tumors can be felt during a physical exam, others cannot.
- **Cancer spread.** Prostate cancer may spread outside the prostate, to lymph nodes and nearby organs. In some cases, the cancer spreads further to bones or organs in distant parts of the body. This is called metastasis.

Diagnosing Prostate Cancer

Most patients with prostate cancer have no symptoms. Urinary problems often are not a sign of cancer, but of an enlarged prostate. To find out if you have prostate cancer, your doctor must examine you and order tests.

Tests include:

- **Prostate specific antigen (PSA) testing.** PSA is a chemical made by prostate tissue. The PSA level (amount of PSA in the blood) is tested to evaluate a man's risk for prostate cancer. In general, a high or rising PSA level may mean an increased cancer risk. If elevated, a prostate biopsy may be needed.
- **Prostate biopsy.** This test involves taking tissue samples from the prostate to provide more information. During the test, as you lie on your side, a small probe is inserted into the rectum. The probe sends an image of your prostate to a video monitor. With this image as a guide, the doctor uses a thin needle to remove tiny tissue samples from the prostate. You are given medications to decrease the pain during the procedure and antibiotics to reduce the risk of an infection.