

# Prostate tests explained

**Male transplant patients who have taken immune suppressing medication for over 10 years may be at risk of prostate cancer. However, it is not known whether or not this is different to the general population. Prostate cancer is diagnosed through a series of tests. This leaflet explains more about the tests for prostate cancer.**

**If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.**

## **What is a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test?**

This is a blood test that measures the total amount of prostate specific antigen (PSA) in your blood. PSA is a protein that is involved in the liquefaction of semen to allow sperm to fertilise ova (eggs). Although PSA is produced in the prostate gland, it is not specific to prostate cancer – PSA levels vary with age and your test result will be interpreted taking your age into account.

A man may have a PSA test for a number of reasons including:

- urinary or erectile symptoms
- having a strong family history of prostate cancer
- suspected prostate cancer (following the doctor or nurse's examination of your back passage)
- to follow-up a previous PSA result.

As part of the annual kidney transplant review, a PSA test is offered to all male patients over the age of 50 who have had a transplant for over 10 years. Men over 40 years old who have a strong family history of prostate cancer or who are from an African-American background are also offered a PSA test.

The test will be done in the kidney clinic.

## **What does an abnormal PSA test result mean?**

An abnormal PSA test result can be caused by:

- infection or inflammation in the prostate gland
- an enlarged benign (non-cancerous) prostate gland
- recent catheterisation (where a hollow, flexible tube is inserted to drain urine from your bladder) or anything that might have been passed down your urethra (the tube that urine passes through from the bladder before leaving the body).

An abnormal PSA result does not necessarily mean a diagnosis of prostate cancer.

If the PSA test result is abnormal, you will need to have an examination of your back passage. This is called a digital rectal examination (DRE).

## **What is a digital rectal examination (DRE)?**

This will be done as part of your outpatient appointment. The doctor will slide their finger gently into your back passage to assess the feel of your prostate and also whether you have any problems with your rectum that would make a biopsy more difficult. They will wear gloves and use gel to make it more comfortable. Understandably, some men find it embarrassing, but it is over quickly and is not usually painful.

We may also recommend a special scan of the prostate, known as an MRI scan.

## **What is an MRI scan of the prostate?**

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. A combination of strong magnets and radio waves produce detailed pictures of the prostate gland. Unlike x-rays and CT (computerised tomography) scans, MRI scans do not use radiation.

The MRI allows us to see the prostate gland very clearly. It tells us how big the prostate is and whether there are areas of the prostate that may suggest prostate cancer.

The scanner is a short tunnel, so if you suffer from claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces) please let the radiology department staff know before you come for your scan. The scan takes about 30 minutes. If you would like further information, please ask us for a copy of the leaflet, **Having an MRI scan**.

If the scan indicates that you need further tests, we may arrange for you to have a prostate biopsy.

## **What is a trans-perineal (TP) biopsy of the prostate?**

A trans-perineal prostate biopsy is where small samples of tissue are taken from your prostate gland. Prostate biopsies in transplant patients are usually carried out under a short general anaesthetic using a new technique called template biopsy. You will be asleep for the entire procedure and you will not feel any pain. The leaflet, **Having an anaesthetic** offers more information.

The biopsy is carried out using an ultrasound probe which is passed into your back passage to scan the prostate. Samples of the prostate gland are then taken through the area of the skin between your scrotum and back passage, called the perineum. Following the procedure, the samples are sent to be examined under a microscope by a specialist.

For more detailed information about this procedure, please ask for a copy of our leaflet **Having a transperineal prostate biopsy**.

## **Will I have a follow-up appointment?**

If the PSA blood test is abnormal you will be informed by telephone (usually within one week) so that further tests can be arranged.

If you require a prostate biopsy, the prostate team will see you in the urology clinic when the result is available. This is usually about three weeks later.

You will continue with your normal scheduled appointments in the transplant review clinic.

## Useful sources of information

**The Prostate Cancer Charity** – Provides support and information for men with prostate cancer.  
**t:** 0845 300 8383  
**w:** [www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk)

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the transplant nurses on 020 7188 5676 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**e:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'      **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **fax:** 020 7188 5953

### NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years. To join:

**t:** 0848 143 4017      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)      **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk)