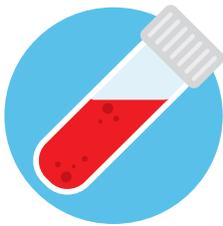




A Handy Guide to PSA Tests

PSA stands for prostate-specific antigen. PSA is a chemical made by the prostate, which is secreted into the semen. However, small amounts of PSA find their way into the blood. PSA is used as a prostate cancer test, but it's normal to have a small amount of PSA in your blood.



What does a PSA test involve?

A PSA test is a blood test for prostate cancer. This can be done in your GP surgery. If you have slightly elevated PSA, you will be called back to have the test again. If you have a high PSA, your GP may discuss referring you to a specialist and further investigations may be advised.

As it is generally felt that the PSA test is an insufficiently accurate indicator of prostate cancer by itself, the results have to be looked at alongside other tests. Some people also find it helpful to undergo regular PSA tests to detect any changes early.



Does an elevated PSA mean I have cancer?

A high PSA (also called raised PSA or elevated PSA) can be a sign of common prostate problems which are not related to cancer, such as prostatitis, or even a urine infection. Certain sports and medications may also temporarily affect PSA levels. You should avoid sexual activity for 48 hours before a PSA test. This is because ejaculation can temporarily increase your PSA levels.



What are the benefits of PSA tests?

PSA tests can pick up some prostate cancers before they have any symptoms. This means that the patient can then decide about whether they should undergo treatment or start monitoring their cancer. It can also mean that if the cancer is fast growing, it may be possible to start treatment early enough to stop the cancer spreading beyond the prostate and becoming advanced prostate cancer.



What's wrong with PSA testing?

There are concerns about a PSA test's real ability to detect prostate cancer. About 3 out of 4 men with a high PSA will not have cancer, however approximately 1 in 7 prostate cancers can be missed. Most men with high PSA tests will require further testing. There are also concerns that many prostate cancers detected by PSA will never cause any problems, leading to unnecessary treatment and worry.



Should I get a PSA test?

That's a decision only you can make. Your GP will be able to speak to you about the pros and cons of a PSA test in more detail and help you to decide whether it is right for you, given any risk factors you might have and your individual circumstances.



Can you get PSA on the NHS?

There is no national screening programme for prostate cancer. However, the NHS runs an Informed Choice Programme, called Prostate Cancer Risk Management. Under this programme, any man over 50 can get the PSA test for free on the NHS. If you are over 50, have thought about the pros and cons and decided that you would like a test, then your GP should give you one.



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