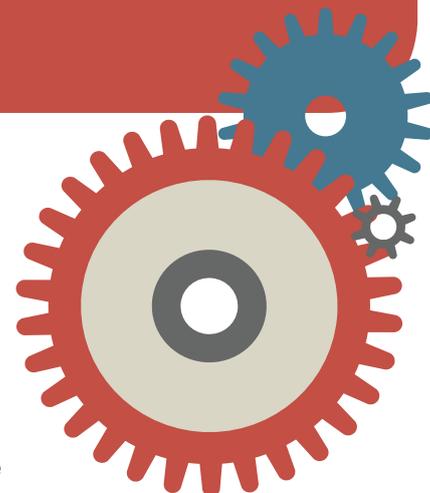


Active surveillance for prostate cancer



When you find out that you have prostate cancer, your first reaction may be to want the cancer removed right away. That's a totally natural and normal response. But not all prostate cancers are alike, and not all of them are aggressive or likely to spread. Some will not cause any problems and some will need treatment.

Sometimes, the best approach is just to monitor the situation and avoid treatments such as surgery or radiation therapy and their side effects. This approach is called active surveillance. This fact sheet outlines some things to consider when deciding the best path for you.

When is active surveillance an option?

Active surveillance may be a good option if you have a small cancer that's limited to the prostate or a slow-growing cancer.

Who can have active surveillance?

Active surveillance won't be the right choice for everyone. A number of men, given the possibility that a cancer could become more aggressive will prefer to treat even the smallest cancer and accept the risk of side effects from treatment. It's a very personal decision and it is your choice.

What happens during active surveillance?

Your doctors actively monitor your cancer with regular tests to check for signs of change. There are a range of tests that might be used with the test selection according to your health, your cancer type and your preference. The following tests are commonly used.

- The prostate specific antigen (PSA) test which measures the amount of PSA in the blood. PSA is a protein produced by the prostate.
- A digital rectal examination (DRE) where a doctor feels the prostate gland through your rectum.
- A prostate biopsy, where small pieces of prostate are removed to be looked at more closely under a microscope for signs of cancer.
- Prostate magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) which is used to check the location and size of the cancer.

You and your doctor will agree how often tests will be needed. You need to fully understand the benefits and problems of active surveillance and other treatment options. Your doctor will let you know if the cancer becomes more active and re-evaluate your treatment options.

Benefits of active surveillance

The advantage of active surveillance for men with prostate cancer limited to the prostate is that you can avoid the potential side effects of surgery and radiation therapy, such as leaking pee (incontinence); problems getting and maintaining an erection; bleeding from the rectum.

Risks of active surveillance

- **Anxiety.** You may be anxious and have a sense of uncertainty about the status of your cancer.
- **Frequent medical appointments.** You will need to meet with your doctors regularly.
- **Cancer growth.** The cancer can grow and spread while you are on active surveillance (less than 1%¹).
- **Fewer treatment options.** If your cancer spreads, you may have fewer options for treatment.

Deciding what to do

Deciding what option is right for you is a very personal choice. Because most prostate cancers are found in the early stages when they are growing slowly, you usually do not have to rush to make treatment decisions. Below are some ideas that may help you work through the decision process. You will make the final decision about what's right for you.

- Take time to talk to the medical people supporting you.
- Discuss with your GP about getting a second opinion before starting treatment, so you are comfortable with the choices you make.
- Learn about the side effects of treatments. Some prostate cancers may never cause any problems, while the treatment can have serious side effects. The more information you have, the better prepared you'll be to make the right decision.
- Talk with family/whānau and friends because your decisions affect them too.
- Talk to the Prostate Cancer Foundation.
- Give yourself time to weigh up the options.

Remember it is common to change your mind at any time and stop, start or change treatment.

Questions to ask your doctor

Knowing the type of questions you can ask your specialist can give you the confidence and knowledge to make the right choice for you. Consider having a family/whānau member go with you to your appointment.

• How often will I have my PSA level checked, and who will do it?	
• How often will I see my doctor or nurse?	
• How will active surveillance affect my family?	
• How often will I have a digital rectal examination (DRE)?	
• When will a repeat biopsy be considered?	
• Will I need to have any scans?	
• How quickly would my PSA level have to rise for you to recommend treatment?	
• What options are available to me if my cancer grows?	
• What emotional support can my family and I receive?	

Looking after health and wellbeing

Take time to look after your spiritual, mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Keep a positive outlook, but if you are feeling low or anxious get support. You may like to contact the Cancer Society (0800 226 237) or Prostate Cancer Foundation (0800 477 678) for extra support.

1. Yamamoto T, Musunuru B, Vesprini D, et al. 2016. Metastatic prostate cancer in men initially treated with active surveillance. *The Journal of Urology* 195(5) 1409–14. DOI: 10.1016/j.juro.2015.11.075. (accessed 23 August 2016).