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What is prostate cancer?

The underlined terms are listed in the glossary.

Prostate cancer is a malignant tumour in the prostate. There are several stages of prostate cancer. Your treatment and experience depend on the specific characteristics of the tumour and the expertise of your medical team.

The sections in this series provide general information about prostate cancer, diagnosis, and various treatment options. Discuss with your doctor what is best in your individual situation.

Most prostate cancers develop slowly and do not cause symptoms. Fast-growing prostate cancer is less common. The risk of getting prostate cancer increases with age. The average age for diagnosis of prostate cancer is 69.

Because of the development in diagnostic tools and longer life expectancy, more prostate cancers are now detected. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in elderly men in Europe. The survival rate for prostate cancer in Europe is relatively high and is still going up.

Stages of the disease

There are different stages of prostate cancer. If the tumour is limited to the prostate and has not spread, this is called localized prostate cancer. In locally-advanced prostate cancer, the tumour has grown out of the prostate into surrounding tissue such as the seminal vesicles, the bladder neck, or lymph nodes around the prostate. Doctors speak of metastatic disease if the cancer has spread either to distant lymph nodes or other organs.

Risk factors for prostate cancer

There are several known risk factors for prostate cancer, of which age is the most important one. Prostate cancer is rare in men younger than 40 and mostly develops in men over the age of 65. A family history of prostate cancer can increase the risk.

This type of cancer is most commonly diagnosed in men of African descent, and least in Asian men. It is still unknown what causes these differences. Eating more meat and dairy products could increase the risk of prostate cancer, but this is still being researched.

What is the prostate?

The prostate is a gland located in the lower urinary tract, under the bladder and around the urethra (**Fig. 1**). Only men have a prostate. It produces part of the fluid which carries semen. The prostate contains smooth muscles which help to push out the semen during ejaculation.

A healthy prostate is about the size of a large walnut and has a volume of 15-25 millilitres. The prostate slowly grows as men grow older.

The medical term for a prostate that has grown in size is benign prostatic enlargement (BPE). Read more about this condition in *EAU Patient Information on BPE*.

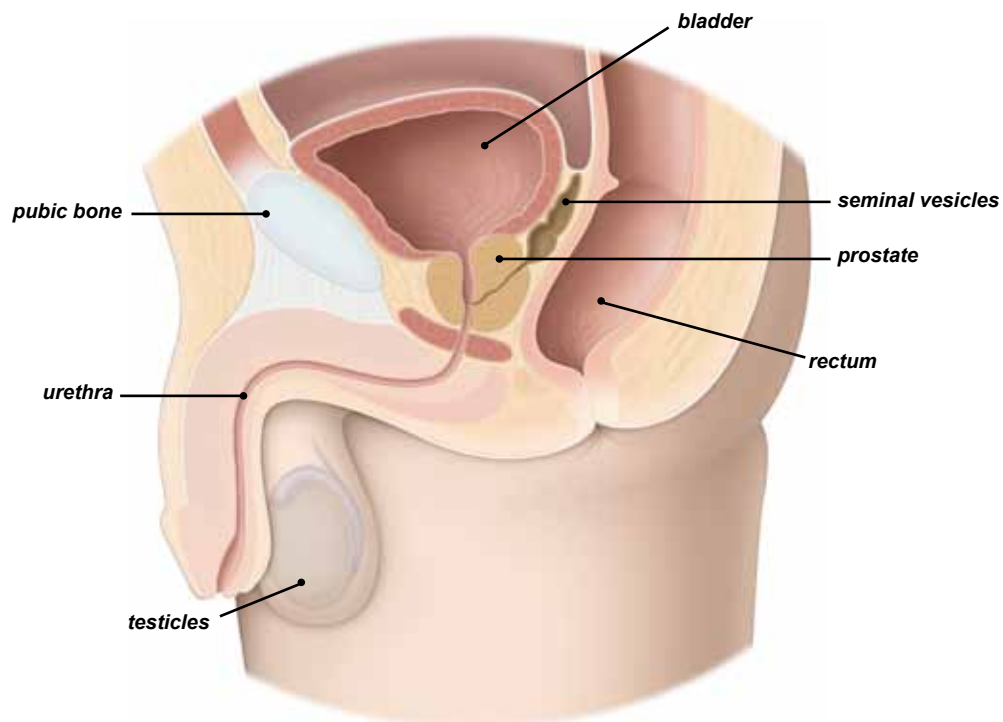


Fig. 1: A healthy prostate in the lower urinary tract.

The role of hormones in prostate cancer cell growth

A tumour develops when cells begin to grow faster than normal. The growth of prostate cancer cells is related to male sex hormones called androgens. Testosterone is the most important androgen. Androgens are almost exclusively produced in the testicles.

This information was updated in January 2015.

This leaflet is part of EAU Patient Information on Prostate Cancer. It contains general information about this disease. If you have any specific questions about your individual medical situation you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider. No leaflet can replace a personal conversation with your doctor.

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The content of this leaflet is in line with the EAU Guidelines.

You can find this and other information on urological diseases at our website: <http://patients.uroweb.org>

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