

PSA Screening – Chesapeake Urology’s Recommendations

The discussion of the use of the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test for prostate cancer screening can be confusing for many patients and physicians. Terms such as “insignificant disease,” “over-diagnosis,” and “unnecessary treatment,” are used to suggest that screening efforts lead to more harm than good. Several large organizations, including the American Urological Association (AUA), have altered their recommendations for PSA screening in recent years.

So, what are men to do in light of conflicting recommendations for PSA screening?

The dilemma remains that roughly 30,000 men per year die from this disease, and many others may experience symptoms related to urinary symptoms, bleeding, or bone pain from metastatic prostate cancer. **As with all cancers, we believe that the best chance for cure of prostate cancer starts with early diagnosis.** The most proven test that we currently have for detecting early forms of prostate cancer is the PSA blood test. In fact, it is estimated that 40 to 50,000 men/year would be dying of prostate cancer if we had not been using PSA screening since the early 1990’s.

Chesapeake Urology’s Recommendation on PSA Screening

Therefore, Chesapeake Urology recommends patients discuss prostate cancer screening with their physician, and if any questions persist, consult a urologist. Men are most at risk for developing significant prostate cancer between ages 55-70. In most cases, we recommend regular screening during this time. Some men may warrant earlier or later screening based on their individual characteristics, and other men may not be good candidates for screening during this time.

Understanding Risks, Benefits to PSA Screening is Vital

Studies performed over the past 20 years have led to questions about screening strategies. Although lives are saved with screening, there are also risks associated with the diagnostic tests and treatments that may outweigh some of the benefits of screening *all* men. It is important for men to understand these risks. The AUA recently recommended only discussing screening with men *of average risk* who are between 55 and 70. This recommendation was based on the available results from studies performed in Europe and America. Many men, however, may have risk factors that warrant screening at earlier or later ages.

At Chesapeake Urology, we believe knowledge is power. That is why we advocate for regular screening for appropriate men using the PSA test and digital rectal exam (DRE). This knowledge, however, is not obtained in a vacuum. Every patient is unique, and different factors may make men more or less at risk for significant prostate cancer. These factors include race, family history, other medical conditions, and age. **What is an abnormal PSA level for one man may not be concerning for another.** For some men, prostate cancer screening may not be recommended at all. Just because a PSA level is abnormal does not mean that a prostate biopsy is mandated.

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Chesapeake Urology's Systematic Approach to Screening, Diagnosis, Treatment of Prostate Cancer

The Chesapeake Urology team understands the complexity of PSA screening. We engage our patients in a discussion about their options prior to any further testing or procedures. We do not react as a reflex and recommend a biopsy for every patient with an elevated PSA level. Because of this approach, Chesapeake Urology finds cancer in a higher percentage of patients on whom we perform a biopsy than the national average. This demonstrates that Chesapeake Urologists are using discretion to avoid biopsies in appropriate patients.

When a man is diagnosed with prostate cancer by a Chesapeake Urology physician, the conversation does not stop. The details learned from a biopsy add more information to help develop a personalized management plan for each patient. These options may include active surveillance, where the disease is closely monitored for signs that it is more aggressive than it appears, but no treatment is undertaken at first. As a patient is deciding on treatment, Chesapeake Urology will also arrange consultations with our experts in surgical and radiation treatments for prostate cancer.

At Chesapeake Urology, when it comes to prostate cancer screening, diagnosis, and treatment, our goal is to make sure each individual has the information to feel comfortable making the choice that is right for them.