Understanding Prostate Health

The prostate gland, commonly referred to as “the prostate,” is found just beneath the male bladder and surrounds the urethra (urine tube). This gland produces a fluid that makes up one-third of the volume of semen, the liquid that carries and protects sperm cells on their way to trying to penetrate the female egg and create a pregnancy. The semen helps the sperm cells survive in the acidic environment of the vaginal canal.

Prostate Health

Research has suggested a relationship between prostate cancer and several factors:

- **Age.** Prostate cancer incidence increases with age. Prostate cancer is rare in men younger than age 40, but occurs in 1 in 6 men in their lifetime.
- **Race.** Men of African descent have the highest risk; men of Asian descent, the lowest.
- **Diet.** A nutritious, balanced diet contributes to prostate health.
- **Genetics.** A man is at increased risk if a family member had prostate cancer, and that risk rises if multiple family members had it.

Prostate cancer screening with a PSA and digital rectal exam (DRE) is recommended for men starting at age 50. (Screening at age 40 is recommended for men of African descent or those with a family history.) In a DRE, the doctor uses a gloved and lubricated finger to feel through the rectal wall and examine the surface of the prostate.

When to call a doctor

- Ongoing weakened or interrupted urine flow
- Frequent urination, especially at night
- Inability to urinate, or difficulty starting or stopping urination
- Blood in the urine
- Painful or burning urination
- Continuing pain in lower back, abdomen, pelvis or upper thighs

Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH)

As a man ages, the prostate gland tends to gradually increase in size. As it enlarges, it may begin to press on and narrow the urethra (urine tube), creating pressure that can lead to difficulty starting, maintaining and stopping a forceful flow of urine.

Symptoms of BPH

- Diminished force and caliber of the urine stream
- Unusually frequent urination (awaking frequently to urinate at night)
- Urgent need to urinate

Prostatitis

Prostatitis is an inflammation of the prostate. Sometimes it begins as a urinary tract infection but will then move into the prostate. The infection can be either acute (sudden and dramatic) or chronic (ongoing, with less intense symptoms).

Symptoms of acute prostatitis

- Burning with urination
- Frequent urination
- Fever and chills
- Pain above the bladder, in the lower back, or between the testicles and rectum
- Often discomfort with urination or ejaculation

Enlarged prostate—benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer usually begins to grow upon the outer regions of the prostate gland. The aggressiveness of the cancer can be estimated by its size on discovery, the degree of abnormality of the cells in the tumor, and the extent of its spread.

Symptoms of late-stage prostate cancer

- Weight loss
- Bone pain
- Inability to empty bladder

Note: Early-stage prostate cancer displays no symptoms.

The PSA test

The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test is used to screen for prostate cancer. However, an elevated PSA may indicate cancer, infection or benign enlargement. This test should be used along with a digital rectal exam to screen for cancer. A recent, multi-country randomized trial has shown that PSA screenings reduce prostate cancer-specific mortality.