



When you read up about your physical condition, you take an important tool into your own hands. The more you know about your physical condition, and the more positive steps you take, the better your chance for positive outcomes and treatment success.

Health Topic: PSA Blood Test

Prostatic-specific antigen (PSA) is a protein produced by cells of the prostate gland, and its levels can be measured in the blood. The doctor takes a blood sample, and the PSA is measured in a laboratory. Because PSA is produced by the body, and can be an indicator of cancer, it is called a tumor marker.

It is normal for men to have low levels of PSA in their blood. There are several conditions that can increase the PSA levels. As men age, both benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH) and prostate cancer become more frequent. Prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) can also raise the blood levels of PSA. There is no evidence that BPH or prostatitis causes cancer, but it is possible to have one or both of these conditions, and to develop prostate cancer as well.

PSA levels alone do not give enough information to distinguish between benign conditions and cancer. However, the doctor will take the result of the PSA test, as well as the digital rectal exam, and decide whether to check further for signs of cancer.

The PSA test is performed to help detect prostate cancer in men, as well as monitoring patients with a history of prostate cancer, to see if the cancer has returned.

PSA testing is recommended as an annual test for men starting at the age of 50. African-Americans and men with a family history of prostate cancer should start at the age of 40.

PSA test results report the level of PSA detected in the blood. In the past, most doctors considered values below 4.0 ng/ml as normal. However, prostate cancer has been detected at lower levels below 4.0, resulting in many doctors using ranges that are based on the patient's age. There is no specific normal or abnormal PSA level. As the PSA levels rise, the higher the chances of prostate cancer being present.

If the PSA level is high, the patient needs to discuss the results with his doctor. There can be different reasons for the elevation. If the blood test is elevated, or the digital exam is suspicious, a biopsy of the prostate may be recommended.