



Simple blood test can catch Prostate Cancer

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This year alone, 31,500 American men will die of prostate cancer – the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in men. The unfortunate part of this statistic is that with a simple blood test, and a physician's care, prostate cancer can be detected and treated earlier, giving men a much better chance of survival.

Prostate cancer strikes the small walnut-shaped prostate gland located near a man's bladder. As the disease progresses, the tumor tends to spread throughout the pelvic region and may eventually spread to the lymph nodes or bones. When this happens, treatment becomes much more difficult and survival rates drop significantly.

The first symptoms of prostate cancer are often overlooked. Most men experience difficulty in urinating as the tumor squeezes the urethra. Other signs include,

- Frequent urination (especially at night)
- A weak or interrupted urine stream
- Pain or burning during urination or ejaculation
- Pus or blood in urine or semen
- Pelvis and lower back discomfort or aching in the upper thighs.

These symptoms should be a major red flag urging to you see a doctor immediately. Better yet, head prostate cancer off early.

Both the American Cancer Society and the American Urological Association recommend men 50 and older should seek a special blood test to detect the cancer, as well as see a doctor for a digital rectal exam.

The blood test is known as a Prostate-Specific Antigen test (PSA). The PSA is highly sensitive and can detect up to eighty percent of prostate cancers. It also picks up on a handful of other abnormalities needing treatment. The PSA is especially good at picking up prostate cancer in the early stages.

However, **a PSA is not a substitute for a digital exam.** Although nobody likes the Digital Rectal Exam, it is part of a combination that could save your life. The Digital Rectal Exam is highly effective in finding prostate cancer in the middle to late stages. Although DRE is less effective than the PSA blood test in finding prostate cancer it can sometimes find cancers in men with normal PSA levels. For this reason, both tests are essential.

It is recommended that men begin blood screening, coupled with an annual DRE, at age 50. Those at high risk (African Americans and men with a close blood relative with prostate cancer) should begin regular testing at age 40. If you're worried about prostate cancer, feel free to get a PSA test at any age.

In an effort to combat prostate cancer in Lincoln County, Lincoln Hospital offers low cost PSA testing twice a year at the annual Fall & Spring Check Up and Blood Draws. The test is \$20. To find dates and times of these low cost blood tests, look on our website under "Programs."

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